

# CRYPT

#68 OF \$4.50

# CTHULHU



## THE H. P. LOVECRAFT CENTENNIAL CONFERENCE

The John Hay Library, Brown University  
Providence, Rhode Island

18-19 August 1990

To mark H. P. Lovecraft's centennial on 20 August 1990, the John Hay Library proudly announces a series of events, presented free of charge, and aimed at as wide an audience as possible, in honor of the great Providence, Rhode Island, author of horror and fantasy.

While still in the early planning stages, the program already features a series of panels boasting premier Lovecraft experts from around the world, a major exhibition of Lovecraft manuscripts, books, and associated items, an art exhibit by top artists featuring works influenced by Lovecraft, as well as walking tours hosted by Henry L. P. Beckwith, author of Lovecraft's Providence (Donald M. Grant, 1986).

The John Hay Library is the most appropriate sponsor of these centennial events, as it holds the largest collection in the world of Lovecraft's manuscripts and printed works.

Inexpensive dormitory rooms on the beautiful Brown University campus will be available to those attending for a nominal fee of approximately \$25-30.

In order to better prepare the program, estimate attendance, and also create a mailing list for updates, we'd like to hear from all interested in attending. Further information about registration and room reservations will be mailed in the coming months.

Please send all inquiries care of Necronomicon Press, 101 Lockwood Street, West Warwick, Rhode Island 02893, USA.

# CRYPT OF CTHULHU

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A Pulp Thriller and Theological Journal

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Volume 9, Number 1

Hallowmas 1989

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## *Debatable and Disturbing:* **EDITORIAL SHARDS**

In Lin Carter's last letter to this magazine, he waxed enthusiastic about Thomas Ligotti's "Vastarien" and "The Mystics of Muelenberg." Lin in his capacities as anthologist and editor of the famous Adult Fantasy Series had a sharp eye for new talent, and one senses in Lin's praises that he saw in Ligotti a unique talent he rather wished he could have claimed the credit for discovering. What he said was, "This Ligotti chap astonishes me. Seems like he came out of nowhere just recently and is already an accomplished master, as far as I'm concerned. His subtlety of effect, control of mood and atmosphere, and sheer power of eerie suggestiveness would have delighted Lovecraft himself, who admired that sort of thing but couldn't do it any more than I can. Suggest you spin off another Cryptic sibling: Ligotti Tales, and put together everything he's published so far. He is a marvel!"

Not a bad idea, Uncle Lin, not a bad idea! Thus this 68th issue of Crypt of Cthulhu collects various stray Ligotti tales not collected in the scarce Silver Scarab Press Songs of a Dead Dreamer, an expanded edition of which is to appear from The Weird Tales Library.

Ligotti is all that Lin said above. Lin, by the way, saw only the Ligotti stories published in Crypt, and perhaps a couple of others. He received Songs of a Dead Dreamer in the hospital only days before he

died and never had a chance to read it. But really any Ligotti tale is a microcosm of his whole oeuvre.

Tom Ligotti combines the traits of unbounded macabre imagination with fluence and prolificity. Everywhere one turns, at least in the small press, one sees his work. Despite occasional forays into the mass-market universe (Inclusions in Salmonson [ed.] Heroic Visions II and Winter [ed.] Prime Evil), Ligotti is content to write for the small circle of lovers of the classical horror tradition. He will not accommodate himself to the style or subjects of modern "Dark Fantasy," nor will he compromise his artistry by working in novel length, too clumsy and blunt an instrument with which to work his intricate sorceries. And in this uncompromising attitude, this "weird for weird's sake" aesthetic integrity, Ligotti is at least as truly Lovecraftian as he is in mood and style.

Most of the "Studies In Horror" are new to this collection, but all the rest of the items assembled here are taken from various now-unobtainable small press magazines. (If you want to know which ones, we suggest you consult the bibliography provided in the excellent Ligotti issue of Dagon.) Most of the tales, however, have been somewhat touched up by the author for their appearance here.

Robert M. Price, Editor

# THE PRODIGY OF DREAMS

By Thomas Ligotti

. . . I conceived my ideal leavetaking from this earth—a drama prepared by strange portents, swiftly developed by dreams and visions nurtured in an atmosphere of sublime dread, growing overnight like some gaudy fungus in a forgotten cellar. . . .

## --The Travel Diaries of Arthur Emerson

It seemed to Arthur Emerson that the swans, those perennial guests of the estate, had somehow become strange. Yet his knowledge of their natural behavior was vague, providing him with little idea of precisely how they had departed from this behavior. But he strongly sensed that there had indeed been such a departure, an imperceptible drifting into the peculiar. Suddenly these creatures, which had become as tedious to him as everything else, filled him with an astonishment he had not known in many years.

That morning they were gathered at the center of the lake, barely visible within a milky haze which hovered above still waters. For as long as he observed them, they did not allow themselves the slightest motion toward the grassy shores circling the lake. Each of them—there were four—faced a separate direction, as though some antagonism existed within their order. Then their sleek, ghostly forms revolved with a mechanical ease and came to huddle around an imaginary point of focus. For a moment their heads nodded slightly toward one another, bowing in wordless prayer; but soon they stretched their snaking necks in unison, elevated their orange and black bills toward the thick mist above, and gazed into its depths. There followed a series of haunting cries unlike anything ever heard on the vast grounds of that isolated estate.

Arthur Emerson now wondered if something he could not see was disturbing the swans. As he stood

at the tall windows which faced the lake, he made a mental note to have Graff go down there and find out what he could. Possibly some unwelcome animal was now living in the dense woods nearby. And as he further considered the matter, it appeared that the numerous wild ducks, those brownish goblins that were always either visible or audible somewhere in the vicinity of the lake, had already vacated the area. Or perhaps they were only obscured by the unusually heavy mist of that peculiar morning.

Arthur Emerson spent most of the morning and afternoon in the library. At intervals he was visited by a very black cat, an aloof and somewhat phantasmal member of the small Emerson household. Eventually it fell asleep on a sunny window ledge, while its master wandered among the countless uncatalogued volumes he had accumulated over the past fifty years or so.

During his childhood, the collection which filled the library's dark shelves was a common one, and much of it he had given away or destroyed in order to provide room for other works. He was the only scholar in a lengthy succession of businessmen of one kind or another, the last living member of the old family; at his death, the estate would probably pass into the hands of a distant relative whose name and face he did not know. But this was not of any great concern to Arthur Emerson: resignation to his own inconsequence, along with that of all things of the earth, was a philosophy he had nurtured for

some time, and with considerable success.

In his younger years he had travelled a great deal, these excursions often relating to his studies, which could be approximately described as ethnological bordering on the esoteric. Throughout various quarters of what now seemed to him a shrunken, almost claustrophobic world, he had attempted to satisfy an inborn craving to comprehend what then seemed to him an astonishing, even shocking existence. Arthur Emerson recalled that while still a child he felt strangely oppressed by the gaping expanses he sensed in the world around him, a genuinely physical response to the venues which may have appeared merely as a patch of pink sky above leafless trees in twilight or as an abandoned room where dust settled on portraits and old furniture. To him, however, these appearances disguised realms of an entirely different nature. For within these imagined or divined spheres there existed a certain . . . confusion, a swirling, fluttering motion that was belied by the relative order of the seen.

Only on rare occasions could he enter these unseen spaces, and always unexpectedly. A striking experience of this kind took place in his childhood years and involved a previous generation of the present-day swans, which he had paused one warm summer afternoon to contemplate from a high grassy bank. Perhaps their smooth drifting and gliding upon the water had induced in him something like a hypnotic state. The ultimate effect, however, was not the serene catatonia of hypnosis, but a whirling flight through a glittering threshold which opened within the transparent air itself, propelling him into a kaleidoscopic universe where space consisted only of multi-colored and ever-changing currents, as of wind or water, and where time did not exist.

Later he became a student of the imaginary lands hypothesized by legends and theologies, and he had

sojourned in places which concealed or suggested unknown orders of existences. Among the volumes in his library were several of his own authorship, bibliographical shadows of his lifetime obsessions. His body of works included such titles as: In the Margins of Paradise, The Forgotten Universe of the Vicoli, and The Secret Gods and Other Studies. For many feverish years he was burdened with the sensation, an ancient one to be sure, that the incredible sprawl of human history was yet no more than a pathetically partial record of an infinitely vast and shadowed chronicle of universal metamorphoses. How much greater, then, was his feeling that his own pathetic history formed a practically invisible fragment of what itself was merely an obscure splinter of the infinite. Somehow he needed to exorcise himself from this dungeon cell to which he had been condemned; In the end, however, he broke beneath the weight of his aspirations. And as the years passed, the only mystery which seemed worthy of his interest, and to his amazement, was that unknown day which would inaugurate his personal eternity; that incredible day on which the sun simply would not rise, and forever would begin.

Arthur Emerson pulled a rather large book down from its high shelf and ambled toward a cluttered desk to make some notes for a work which would very likely be his last. Its tentative title: Dynasties of Dust.

Toward nightfall he suspended his work. With much stiffness, he walked to the window ledge where the cat slept soundly in the fading light of dusk. But its body seemed to rise and fall a little too vigorously for sleep, and it made a strange wheezing music somehow unlike its usual murmuring purr. The cat opened its eyes and rolled sideways, as it often did when inviting a hand to stroke its glossy black fur. But as soon as Arthur Emerson laid his palm upon that smooth coat, his fingers were rapidly gnawed. The cat then leaped

to the floor and ran off into the house, while Arthur Emerson watched his own blood trickling from the bite.

All that evening he felt restless, profoundly at odds with the atmosphere of each room he entered and then soon abandoned. He wandered the house, telling himself that he was in search of his ebony pet, in order to establish the terms of their misunderstanding. But this pretext would every so often dissolve, and it then became clear to Arthur Emerson that he searched for something less tangible than a runaway cat. The rooms, however high their ceilings, suffocated him with their shadows; his footsteps, echoing sharply down long gleaming corridors, sounded like the clacking of bones. The house was his luxurious and many-chambered mausoleum, an expansive tomb.

He finally abandoned the search and allowed fatigue to guide him to his bedroom, where immediately he opened a window in the hope that something without a name would fly from the house. But he now discovered that it was not only the house which was swollen with mysteries; it was the very night itself. A nocturnal breeze began lifting the curtains; it was the same temperature as the air of the room and together they mingled with an appalling intimacy. Shapeless clumps of clouds floated with a mechanical complacency across a horrible stone grey sky, a sky which itself seemed shapeless rather than evenly infinite. To his left he saw that the inner surface of the open window reflected a man's face, and he pushed the fear-stricken thing out into the darkness.

Arthur Emerson eventually slept that night, but he also dreamed. His dream was without definite form, a realm of fog where crafty shadows glided, their dark mass shifting fluently. For an unknown interval he haunted the edges of this region, feeling that something else was involved with the masking mist before him, that this was the un-

canny locus of a certain thing, of a shape unlike any he had ever known. Then, through the queerly gathered and drifting clouds of fog, he saw a shadow whose dark monstrosity made the others seem shapely and radiant. It was a deformed colossus, a disfigured monument carved from the absolute density of the blackest abyss. And now the lesser shadows, the pale and meager shadows, seemed to join in a squealing chorus of praise to the greater one. He gazed at the Cyclopean thing in a trance of horror, until its mountainous mass began to move, slowly stretching out some senseless part of itself, flexing what might have been a misshapen arm. And when he awoke, scattering the bedcovers, he felt a warm breeze wafting in through a window which he could not remember having left open.

The next morning it became apparent that there would be no relief from the uncanny influences which seemed still to be lingering from the day before. All about the Emerson estate a terrific fog had formed, blinding the inhabitants of the house to most of the world beyond the windows; and what few shapes remained visible—the closest and darkest trees, a few rose bushes pressing against the windows—seemed drained of all earthly substance, creating a landscape both infinite and imprisoning, an estate of dream. Unseen in the fog, the swans were calling out like banshees down by the lake. And even Graff, when he appeared in the library attired in a bulky grounds-keeper's jacket and soiled trousers, looked less like a man than like a specter of ill prophecy.

"Are you certain," said Arthur Emerson, who was seated at his desk, "that you have nothing to report about those creatures?"

"No sir," replied Graff. "Nothing."

There was, however, something else Graff had discovered, something which he thought the master of the house should see for himself.

Together they travelled down several stairways leading to the various cellars and storage chambers beneath the house. On the way Graff explained that, as also ordered, he had searched for the cat, which had not been seen since last evening. Arthur Emerson only gazed at his man and nodded in silence, while inwardly babbling to himself about some strangeness he perceived in the old retainer. Between every few phrases the man would begin humming, or rather singing at the back of his throat in an entirely peculiar manner.

After making their way far into the dark catacombs of the Emerson house, they arrived at a remote room which seemed to have been left unfinished. There were no lighting fixtures (except the one recently improvised by Graff), the stone walls were unplastered and unpainted, and the floor was of hard, bare earth. Graff pointed downward, and his crooked finger wandered in an arc through the sepulchral dimness of the room. Arthur Emerson now saw that the place had been turned into a charnel house for the remains of small animals: mice, rats, birds, squirrels, even a few young possums and raccoons. He already knew the cat to be an obsessive hunter, but it seemed strange that these carcasses had all been brought to this room, as if it were a kind of sanctum of mutilation and death.

While contemplating this macabre chamber, Arthur Emerson noticed peripherally that Graff was fidgeting with some object concealed in his pocket. How strange indeed the old servant had become.

"What have you got there?" Arthur Emerson asked.

"Sir?" Graff replied, as though his manual gyrations had proceeded without his awareness. "Oh, this," he said, revealing a metal gardening implement with four clawlike prongs. "I was doing some work outdoors; that is, I was intending to do so, if there was time."

"Time? On a day like this?"

Obviously embarrassed and at a

loss to explain himself, Graff pointed the taloned tool at the decomposing carcasses. "None of the animals actually seem to have been eaten," he quietly observed, and that curious piping in his throat sounded almost louder than his words.

"No," Arthur Emerson agreed with some bewilderment. He then reached up to grasp a thick black cord which Graff had slung over the rafters, trying to manipulate the bulb to more fully illuminate the room. Incautiously, perhaps, Arthur Emerson was thinking that there existed some method to the way the bodies of the slaughtered creatures were positioned across the entire floor. Graff's next remark approximated the unformed perception of his employer: "Like a trail of dominos winding round and round. But no true sense to it."

Arthur Emerson readily granted the apt analogy to a maze of dominos, but concerning the second of Graff's statements there suddenly appeared to be some doubt. For at that moment Arthur Emerson looked up and saw a queerly shaped stain, as if made by mold or moisture, upon the far wall.

"Shall I clean the place out?" asked Graff, raising the metal claw.

"What? No," decided Arthur Emerson as he gazed at the shapeless, groping horror that appeared to have crawled from his own dream and stained itself into the stone before him. "Leave everything exactly as it is," he ordered the old whistling servant.

Arthur Emerson returned to the library, and there he began to explore a certain shelf of books. This shelf comprised his private archives of handsomely bound travel diaries he had kept over the years. He withdrew one after another, paged through each volume, and then replaced it. Finally he found the one he wanted, which was the record of a visit to central and southern Italy made when he was a young man. Settling down at his desk, he leaned into the words before him.



After reading only a few sentences he began to wonder who this strange, lyrical creature, this ghost, might be. No doubt himself, but in some previous incarnation, some bizarre anterior life.

--Spoletto (Ides of October)

What wonders dwell within the vicoli! How often can I celebrate those fabulous little thoroughfares which form a maze of magic and dreams, and how often can I praise the medieval hill towns of Umbria which are woven of such streets? Guiding one into courtyards, cloisters, and blind alleys, they are snug roads invented for the meanderings of sleepwalkers. One is embraced by the gray walls of high houses, one is nestled beneath their wood-beamed roofs and beneath innumerable arches as they cut the monotonous day into a wealth of shadows and frame the stars 'at night within random curves and angles. Nightfall in the vicoli! Pale yellow lanterns awake like apparitions in the last moments of twilight, claiming the dark narrow lanes for their own, granting an enchanted but somewhat uneasy passage to those who would walk there. And last evening I found myself among these spirits.

Intoxicated as much by the Via Porta Fuga as by the wine I had drunk at dinner, I wandered across bridges, beneath arches and overhanging houses, up and down battered stairways, past ivy-hung walls and black windows masked with iron grillwork. I turned a corner and glimpsed a small open doorway ahead. Without thinking, I looked inside as I passed, seeing only a tiny niche, not even a room, which must have been constructed in the space between two buildings. All I could clearly discern were two small

candles which were the source and focus of a confusion of shadows. From inside a man's voice spoke to me in English: "A survival of the ancient world," said the voice; which carried the accent of a cultivated Englishman, sounding very bored and mechanical and very out of place in the circumstances. And I also must note a strange whistling quality in his words, as if his naturally low speaking voice were resonating with faintly high-pitched overtones. "Yes, sir, I am speaking to you," he continued. "A fragment of antiquity, a survival of the ancient world. Nothing to fear, there is no fee demanded."

He now appeared in the doorway, a balding and flabby middle-aged gentleman in a tattered, tieless suit—the image of his own weary voice, the voice of an exhausted fairgrounds huckster. His face, as it reflected the pale yellow light of the lantern beside the open doorway, was a calm face; but its calmness seemed to derive from a total despair of soul rather than from a serenity of mind. "I am referring to the altar of the god," he said. "Whatever you have heard, that one is not among those deities you may have heard about; that one is not among those divinities you may have laughed about. It may be distantly related, perhaps, to those numina of Roman cesspools and sewage systems. But it is not a mere Cloacina, not a Mephitis or Robigo. In name, the god is known as Cynothoglys: the god without shape, the god of decompositions, the mortician god of both gods and men, the metamortician of all things. There is no fee demanded."

I remained where I stood, and then the man stepped out into the little vicolo in order to allow me a better view through the open doorway, into the can-

dileit room beyond. I could now see that the candles were shining on either side of a low slab, cheap candles that sent out a quivering haze of smoke. Between these tapers was an object which I could not define, some poor shapeless thing, perhaps the molten relic of a volcanic eruption at some distant time, but certainly not the image of an ancient deity. There seemed to be nothing and no one else inhabiting that sinister little nook. I may now contend that, given the unusual circumstances described above, the wisest course of action would have been to mumble a few polite excuses and move on. But I have also described the spell which is cast by the vicoli, by their dimly glowing and twisted depths. Entranced by these dreamlike surroundings, I was thus prepared to accept the strange gentleman's offer, if only to enhance my feeling of intoxication with all the formless mysteries whose name was now Cynothoglys.

"But be solemn, sir. I warn you to be solemn."

I stared at the man for a brief moment, and in that moment this urging of my solemnity seemed connected in some way to his own slavish and impoverished state, which I found it difficult to believe had always been his condition. "The god will not mock your devotions, your prayers," he whispered and whistled. "Nor will it be mocked."

Then, stepping through the little doorway, I approached the primitive altar. Occupying its center was a dark, monolithic object whose twisting shapelessness has placed it beyond simple analogies in my imagination. Yet there was something in its contours—a certain dynamism, like that of great, crablike roots springing forth from the ground—which suggested more than mere chaos or random creation.

Perhaps the following statement could be more sensibly attributed to the mood of the moment, but there seemed a definite power somehow linked to this gnarled effigy, a gloomy force which was disguised by its monumentally static appearance. Toward the summit of the mutilated sculpture, a crooked arm-like appendage extended outward in a frozen grasp, as if it had held this position for unknown eons and at any time might resume, and conclude, its movement.

I drew closer to the contorted idol, remaining in its presence far longer than I intended. That I actually found myself composing a kind of supplication tells more than I am presently able about my mental and spiritual state last evening. Was it this beast of writhing stone or the spell of the vicoli which inspired my prayer and determined its form? It was, I think, something which they shared, a suggestion of great things: great secrets and great sorrows, great wonders and catastrophes, great destinies, great doom, and a single great death. My own. Drugged by this inspiration, I conceived my ideal leavetaking from this earth—a drama prepared by strange portents, swiftly developed by dreams and visions nurtured in an atmosphere of sublime dread, growing overnight like some gaudy fungus in a forgotten cellar, and always with the awful hand of the mortician god working the machinery behind the scenes. Beasts and men would form an alliance with great Cynothoglys, the elements themselves would enter into the conspiracy, a muted vortex of strange forces all culminating in a spectral denouement, all converging to deliver me to the inevitable, but deliver me in a manner worthy of the most expansive and unearthly sensations of my life. I conceived

the primal salvation of tearing flesh, of seizure by the god and the ecstatic rending of the frail envelope of skin and sinew. And as others only sink into their deaths—into mine I would soar.

But how could I have desired this to be? I now wonder, fully sober following my debauch of dreams. Perhaps I am too repentant of my prayer and try to reassure myself by my very inability to imagine the exact state of mind which could accommodate this vision and give it a place in the history of the world. The mere memory of this delirium, I expect, will serve to carry me through many of the barren days ahead, though only to abandon me in the end to a pathetic demise of meaningless pain. By then I may have forgotten the god I encountered, along with the one who served him like a slave. Both seem to have disappeared from the vicoli, their temple standing empty and abandoned. And henceforth I will probably imagine that it was not I who came to the vicoli to meet the god, but the god who came to meet me.

After reading these old words, Arthur Emerson sat silent and solemn at his desk. Was it over for him, then? All the portents had appeared and all the functionaries of his doom were now assembled, both outside the library door—where the footfall of man and beast sounded—and beyond the library windows, where a horrible thing without shape had begun to loom out of the fog, reaching through the walls and windows as if they too were merely mist. Were a thousand thoughts of outrage and dread now supposed to rise within him at the prospect of this occult extermination? After all, he was about to have forced upon him that dream of death, that whim of some young adventurer who could not resist being granted a wish or two by a tourist

attraction.

And now the crying of the swans had begun to sound from the lake and through the fog and into the house. Their shrieks were echoing everywhere, and he might have predicted as much. Would he soon be required to add his own shrieks to theirs; was it now time to be overcome by the wonder of the unknown and the majesty of fate; was this how it was done in the world of doom?

Risking an accusation of bad manners, Arthur Emerson failed to rise from his chair to greet the guest he had invited so long ago. "You are too late," he said in a dry voice. "But since you have taken the trouble . . ." And the god, like some obedient slave or machine, descended upon its incurious victim, while the screams of the swans soared high into the muffling fog.

#### MAIL-CALL (from page 65)

polishing. In my enthusiasm, I not only completed some Lovecraftian poems (The Demons of the Upper Air) and did a series of dark starlit illustrations for his tales (splatter-stencils), I also inserted a few Mythos references into my Fafhrd-Mouser novella Adept's Gambit (not published until 10 years later), and I wrote some 3,000 words of a modern-setting Mythos novel-ette to be titled The Burrowers Beneath.

Then Lovecraft died. I put away the fragments of the novel-ette and soon wrote the Mythos-references out of Adept's Gambit; they clearly had no place there.

In answer to Mr. Berglund, I would say that I was wrong on two points: the story was begun before Lovecraft's death (Robert Bloch spoke for many of Lovecraft's young disciples, I think, when he told Lin Carter that after Lovecraft's death, the fun went out of trying to write Mythos fiction), and Leiber did not

(continued on page 36)

# ALLAN AND ADELAIDE: AN ARABESQUE

By Thomas Ligotti

There are some qualities—some incorporate things  
That have a double life, which thus is made  
A type of that twin entity which springs  
From matter and light, evinced in solid and shade.

POE: Sonnet—Silence.

## 1. The brand new beasts

We tried, my twin sister and I, to be rid of them. They had always been my chief grievance about the old house. Despite their nature as a sort of inheritance, I could never place them in the same order as the house itself. To me their necessity was not at all evident, not like the foundation of the house or the particular arrangement of its rooms. And this, I found, was true: they had no relationship to the physical aspects of the house and its furnishings. Their presence was more like that of the grotesque shadows in our lamplit hallways, a shifting and spectral element of the scene. What a fright to have these shadows, but what a stranger fright would be their absence! Nonetheless, to effect such an absence was precisely my ambition.

So it was that Adelaide and I descended into the deepest cellar of our house to perform the exorcism. By pure chance I had found the exact book, among all the volumes of our vast library, that would finally make this possible. Adelaide had asked me to find a particular book for her one sullen afternoon, and it was right beside it that I found the other book. What good fortune this courtesy to my sister had brought me, though I am never entirely surprised when anything of a pleasant nature is connected with gentle Adelaide.

It was she who made the exorcism a success, even lending the ceremony a measure of queer excitement. In the dripping silence of that stonework cellar, thick can-

dles burned on either side of the statuesque Adelaide, who read in the most compelling tones from the book I held open before her. It was written in a language that I but half knew, though it seemed the very tongue of Adelaide's soul. One by one I turned the pages when her instructing eyes told me to do so. Oh, the virtuosity of her hermetic performance! From the subterranean passages below that cellar floor the formless squeals of bestial things continually emanated like the seeping cold of the abyss. How long I had listened to those maddening sounds, which sometimes were perceptible in every part of the house and even penetrated the walls of my sleep. Now would be their end. Adelaide spoke the final words of the ritual, and as the echoes died so did the sounds of those things below us become silence. I was free of them.

This, I thought, was the beginning of a golden age in the old house. For the first time in its immemorial history the house would be filled with only the natural sounds of its residents and those comforting noises of its ripe structure. For the first time I could hear, of a winter's evening, my sister's voluptuous singing without fear of her voice merging with that demonic chorus below. And for a brief time this state of bliss endured. Adelaide sang while I accompanied her on my guitar, the wind of moonless nights harmonized with our music, and all was like a perfect piece of an eternal dream.

It was following just such an evening of song that everything

changed, reverted to what it had once been and even worse. In the darkness I awoke among the nightmare-tangled covers of my bed. Sounds had disturbed my sleep, sounds like nothing I had ever heard or hope to hear. What shapes, what forms of corrupt generation made such a bestial cacophony? Every corner of my room, of the entire house, was tainted with surge after surge of acoustic foulage.

I ran to my sister's bed chamber but found it empty and her covers undisturbed, a situation I perceived immediately due to my gift of acute vision in the absence of light. The thought of her roaming alone among the noises of that night caused me near crippling apprehension. Of all dread misfortunes, was she perhaps on one of the lower floors, where the diseased din rose to its most intense potency? Running down the corridor, I arrived at the top of the stairway and to my relief saw the figure of Adelaide already ascending.

But she seemed to be lumbering up the stairs, lacking her usual quality of almost airborne grace. And of all things, it now appeared as if she were walking backwards, for I saw naught but her hair tumbling over that pretty face. Even more curious, it seemed that two eyes peered out at me from among her nest of locks. But in the darkness of the middle of the night, especially that night, one is likely to witness anything, and I rubbed this strange illusion from my sleep-ensorcelled eyes, now to see my sister looking as she always had. She reached the top of the stairs, and I embraced her with fear of a thousand things.

"Adelaide, what is happening?" I cried. "Have they returned to torment me?"

She did not reply immediately but rushed us to the sanctum of her bed chamber, where I first noticed the torn and sullied condition of her nightgown.

"Do not worry about my gown, my brother. I have been . . . working this night. There is not

sufficient time in the day for the chores required to keep our house as we wish it to remain."

"But did you not hear the sounds? What are they, Adelaide, do you know? I've never heard such horror, not even before we went into the cellar and drove them out. But they did not make sounds like this. Oh tell me, have the old beasts returned? If so, we will use words of even greater power to exorcise them once again. We still have the book."

When I had finished, Adelaide looked into my face with infinite solemnity, and said:

"We still have the book, my brother, but it is of no use against these ones."

"But they are the old beasts," I argued. "We know them well, their fears and weaknesses."

"Listen to me, Allan," instructed my sister. "These are not our old friends, not the ones who made the noises we had grown to know over the years. These, Allan, are the new beasts."

Without entirely comprehending her words, I cried out:

"But they will destroy our beautiful home. They are not like the others. They have the run of the house!"

"It is only for this night, when first they come. You were not here the first night of the old ones."

"Nor were you, my twin."

"They are always like this the first night," she continued without answering my protest.

At that moment I thought I heard something sniffing and wheezing outside the door. Holding one of the lamps my sister had lit, I opened the door and cast its light into the hallway. Whatever was there had moved out of my sight, but for a second I glimpsed a shadow which lumbered at a queer removal from its source. After this sight I informed Adelaide that for her protection I would stay with her through the course of what would no doubt be a sleepless night. Following a moment of strange re-

luctance on her part, she agreed to my intentions.

Despite the trauma and tragedy of that evening, courageous Adelaide soon retired within the curtains of her bed and fell into a quiet sleep. For what seemed an eternity I stood a vigil by the door, imagining what destruction and stench we would have to confront when we descended into the house next morning. And I suffered that peculiar terror of knowing nothing would ever be the same again.

But eventually, following Adelaide's fearless example, I too ignored the infernal invasion of our home and allowed myself to rest. Soundlessly I crept over to the bed curtains and pulled them back to witness Adelaide's dreaming serenity. With sorrow as my soporific, I curled up at the foot of my sister's bed . . . and slept.

## 2. The twin who went to town

My sister Adelaide sometimes forces herself to leave the immense comforts of our old house and travels into town, a place where I have never been. Though we are twins, identical in many habits and activities, somehow this burden has fallen upon her shoulders. "Allan," she says to me, "do not worry while I'm away. I will be back soon. Then we'll do something special. And take good care of the house, my brother. You know how I like to think of it every moment that we're separated." I wave to her as she walks down the road leading to the town. Even when she can no longer see me, I wave. And I really don't worry very much about her, for I know she is quite able to take care of herself.

I once asked Adelaide if I might not accompany her on one of these trips into town. For some time the idea had been plaguing my mind. One night, not long before, I had awakened from a wild carnival of a dream from which I could save no memory concerning its particular adventures. But upon opening my eyes I uncontrollably called out something into the darkness. Two

words: "The town!" It was after this dream that I appealed to my sister for a chance to see this place which for me was such an obscurity. Would it forever remain so?

"You do not know what it is like, Allan," she answered. "The people there are not as you are. They are unnaturally confused; always in strange turmoil and doing strange things. They do not have your sense of reason or your balance of temperament. You must stay as you are, then, and remain at the house."

My sister flattered me, for she has always been the twin with the true powers of reason and deep knowledge. In many disciplines she has been my instructress. So when she advised that I should be the one to keep myself at home, I listened closely and complied.

Adelaide returned late the other night from her most recent excursion to the town. I was already asleep but awoke when I heard a series of sounds tracing my sister's way to her bed chamber and a well-deserved rest. Later that night I was awakened by a second commotion. At least, I think I was awake and not dreaming. (There are so many confusions in the middle of the night.) In any case, what I heard was a thunderous, insistent pounding on our front door. And there was a voice, the voice of a woman if I am not mistaken. It was difficult to tell because of the storm and the fact that the voice was unnaturally straining itself to be heard above the violent rain and thunder. Perhaps that is all I really heard. But at one point the voice sounded so definite. Quite clearly I heard the unknown woman scream out: "You she-devil! What have you done to them? You didn't need them all." After this outburst, which rang lucidly in my ears, the voice became lost among all the moaning turbulence of the storm.

The next morning was decorated by a heavy mist, making it almost impossible to see out our windows. As we serenely passed the morning hours, I told Adelaide of my dubi-

ous experience the night before. She was tired, and I'm not sure she heard my story properly.

"You see how mad those townspeople are?"

I had said nothing specifically about any townspeople, only the strange woman, who might have come from the countryside of my imagination. "They spread lies even in your dreams," she continued. "So I hope you will listen to me from now on and never again mention that town. This is for your own good, Allan."

Ever since then I have never initiated this subject in conversation, though occasionally Adelaide forgets herself and alludes to the matter, saying: "Oh, those horrible people." But I do not talk about them; I do not even think about their unspeakable lives. I cannot help, however, those things that come to me in dreams. Adelaide cannot blame me for what happens there.

And lately I feel there has been some terrible trouble with my dreams, though not only the ones about the town. There are other dreams, more—how shall I say it?—more loathsomely reverberant in their power. I only hope that this power will soon exhaust itself in the coming nights, like a frightening storm throughout which one is allowed to sleep.

Please let this be so.

### 3. The demented deacons

I have seen the soul of the universe . . . and it is insane.

A dream has all but laid my world to waste. Even now I still doubt if I have fully made my way back to the waking realm. But if I have not, the difference is no longer a great one: certain signs have told me there is nothing left that waits on my return. It was a horror. Shadowy things frolicked in the dream like lurid acrobats. And vast stretches of space. But I should start at the beginning, though no dream has one that can ever be remembered.

I found myself in a windowless

room lit by candles on metal stands of varying heights. I recall feeling that the room was in a strange place somewhere outside the house. Opposite me was a dark curtain which hung from the ceiling to the floor and spanned the entire distance between the walls, dividing the room into sections of unknown relative proportions. Eventually I came to realise that I was bound to a throne-like chair facing the curtain. Behind the chair, and in the periphery of my vision, passed back and forth a number of slow-moving shapes. These shapes, from the little that could be seen of them, resembled figures on playing cards. (And how this painfully recalls those wonderful games Adelaide was always teaching me.) At some point I came to think of these figures as "The Demented Deacons."

They were carrying on a kind of inquisition, with myself as the sole object defining their roles. They asked me strange questions which suggested matters having nothing whatever to do with my life.

"Who are your gods?" they asked, somehow in unison. Ignorant silence was my answer. They became more clever, gleefully titting at the virtuosity of their interrogation.

"Do your gods soar?" they inquired, pantomiming the question with outstretched wings that were not wings, nor were they arms. I saw no harm in giving a positive answer, which could be nothing but complimentary to any gods worthy of the name.

"And do they not sometimes descend to earth?" the Deacons continued. To affirm this question, I reasoned, would be safe enough, since its answer was nearly self-implied. Complacently I awaited the next question. For this one they had to confer among themselves for a few moments; then, while the others looked on, one of them stepped forward and addressed me.

"When they descend, do they not begin to lumber like beasts? Do they sometimes get down and crawl, your gods?"

I should have remained silent

but instead I shouted, "No more of your questions!" This outburst seemed to please the Deacons to no end as a minor revelation. They next returned to less suggestively sinister questions. Once again a single figure, different from the previous one, came forward to interrogate me.

"Do your gods sometimes speak in tongues strange to you? Do these ones sling their words and use magic? Do they look sidelong to admire themselves in mirrors?"

Again their questions seemed innocent ones, and ones whose denial would be out of keeping with any concept of godhood. Of course my gods, though I knew them not, were learned in the ways of language and sorcery and indeed had much to admire about themselves.

There was now excitement among the figures, even as they lethargically milled around my chair, speaking to one another in low tones. There was some important matter to be deliberated upon, and soon they seemed to have reached a kind of agreement, judging by a certain mood which distinctly emanated from these figures. A new phase of the inquisition was to begin, one for which the interrogative talents of the Deacons were now inadequate. They moved away from my chair, their ranks perhaps dispersing and dissolving back into the shadows whence they came.

I was now alone, my eyes fixed upon the curtain that veiled some indefinite portion of the room. Whatever was beyond the curtain would continue the inquisition, I thought as if this were obvious. And considering the remarkable questions put to me by the playing-card figures, how much more remarkable would be the interrogations from the darker side of the curtain, where there seemed only an unknown and lightless abyss. I waited with an imaginary forevision of the horrific wonders to come.

However, events did not unfold as I expected. Yes, there were questions asked of me from that region on the other side of the cur-

tain. But with these questions the dream diverged into greater realms of nightmare. For the source of these questions was the very genius of demonic dread--that Horror-Maker known to me from a thousand dreams where sudden dread usurps all serenity like a panic cry of "Fire," of "Murder," of stealthy "Invader."

Its presence always permeates the dream: fog with a pallid face drifting in through an open window. It fuses its tormented spirit with dead objects, animating things which should not move or live, breathing a blasphemous life into the unliving. One glance at a design on the wall catches this Horror-Maker engendering a world of writhing creatures there. It lives in all things, and they tilt and flutter with a menacing absence of purpose or predictability. Finally it melds with the slowly coagulating shadows, and now it is without limits as it spreads to command a domain of quivering darkness. The universe becomes its impossible body, its corpse. As the blackness of space is its corrupting blood, so the planets are multiple skulls of the freakish beast; the paths of doomed meteors trace the architecture of its labyrinthine skeletal frame; spasms of dying galaxies are its nervous tics; and strange stellar venues of incomprehensible properties are the chambers of its soul. Within this universe the dreamer is trapped, his dreams confined to the interior of a form other than his own. But finally this Horror-Maker moves from outside to inside the dreamer, subverting his heroic autonomy, and becoming one with him. Now it is he himself who generates those nightmares from that design on the wall. Every glimpse conjures universes of cavorting horrors, and ultimately even the crystal absence of the void becomes populated by every monstrosity that can or cannot exist. There is no refuge from the living void, the terror of the invisible. And the focus of my fear sharpened into hideous implications about my sister and myself. The



interrogations of the Horror-Maker could not be evaded, unless I was willing to remain in that dream forever.

"I could not murder my sister," I finally screamed. "I loved her with all my soul." But the thing behind the curtain—enveloping, omniscient—continued its torturing queries as insistently as ocean waves collapsing on a dead shore. "No, none of that is true; she was not those things. She was my twin, my companion, my teacher, my—"

I could not go on. I wanted to do something horrible to myself and bring everything to an end. And what could be more catastrophic than to draw back the curtains before me, gaining the most insane and self-destructing revelation imaginable. But I was bound to the chair, or so I thought before realising the truth: that I had never been so fettered, that it was only some perverse illusion which caused me to believe otherwise.

I rose stiffly from the chair, apprehensive of my new freedom, and approached the curtain. Something now seemed familiar about it, something in its folds and texture. But there was no opportunity to think at length about these things, for my terror was becoming too intense to bear any longer. Seizing the soft material in my hands at the point where the two sides of the curtain came together, I resolutely spread my arms and gazed within . . .

There, in the dark recesses which I searched with my sight, I saw nothing more than another curtain, an inner curtain that was a twin of the outer one.

I awoke screaming. And this initial terror was infinitely exacerbated when I found that I was not in my own room but was lying in my sister's bed . . . alone.

Adelaide!

#### 4. The last lesson

I must cease this incessant talking to myself. Any moment now my searching of the house will reveal the place where she has secreted

herself, and then I'll have someone else to talk with once again. But suppose she is no longer in the house. Suppose she has gone to the town again, damn her. No, I mustn't say that . . . she has every right. Adelaide! Aaadelllaide! Where are you? Perhaps I shouldn't be looking for her in these clammy cellars. Why should she be down here? And that horrible squealing of the beasts from below is worse than ever. I can hear them all over the house now. Silence, you sullen filthy fiends! I will find her despite you.

There she is. No, just the mirror at the end of the hallway. Oh, Adelaide, I'm still the fool you always knew I was. I think you are lost but your presence greets me every place I look. Here now in the library I've found you reading to me tales out of old books. You loved those times as much as I, didn't you? I never thought I was keeping you from places you would rather be. It was just so hard to be alone and to think we would not always remain together every moment of our lives. You were my only life, Adelaide.

Now walking the hallways of our house, I think I see your shadow next to mine there upon the wall. But how many impossible things have I already thought real: that we always lived in eternity; that we were more than ourselves; that we could surmount the strangeness which exists even between twins such as we; that there were no secrets dividing us?

But those secrets never estranged us in this memory-sealed room, where I can hardly bring myself to pause in my search for you. Here you sang for me in a way that made me imagine we had both passed quietly out of life and were no more than sheer essences harmonising in pools of colour and faded radiance. Painful now to trudge through musty rooms and search the ruddy shadows for your fugitive self, to listen for the tainted echoes of your pure voice only when

those beasts momentarily stop harassing the silence with their demon whining. But I'll search on . . . in every horrible room, for that is what they now are, that is what you have made them.

I'll search the room from which I saw you shyly slipping away one afternoon, and behind whose door I saw that chilling dummy, its hands planted arrogantly on wooden hips and its head thrown back in a frozen burst of laughter. I'll search the room where once stayed a certain tutor of yours, whom I never saw except one night as a mere shadow in the garden, a shadow that looked as if it were seeking the smell and feel of damp earth. I'll search the room of masks and mirrors which you didn't think I knew about. I'll search the room where the clock you once brought to our home even now coughs out its chime with lungs that are not wholly brazen. I'll search the room you decorated in red and black, the room to which you retreated periodically to speak prayers which I pray you did not intend me to hear as I stood outside the door. And I'll search the room about which you denied there was anything wrong but where I continued to find—

Oh Adelaide, I'll search all the rooms that have made this house a labyrinth of unholy ciphers. But foremost has it been an infernal conservatory of blasphemous illumination—with me its dull pupil! And you, my classmate, my instructress, my guide in the ways of estrangement: What is the lesson now? Where are the tones of your learned voice? Where—

No, it is not true. That is not

you, your voice I hear calling from up there.

*Allon, I am here.*

Not from your own room, which was the very first place I searched.

*Hurry, Allon, hurry.*

Adelaide!

No, you cannot be here. You cannot be standing behind this door.

Yes, my brother. Come closer and welcome your sister on her return.

Adelaide, your white nightgown; the blood. Please forgive me, sister. I cannot even explain to you—I felt

*All alone, I know. And betrayed. Lost and lonely Allon. You were always alone, my brother, and so was I. It could never have been otherwise. I know how my lies have hurt you, and what they drove you to do. But none of that matters now, none of that ever mattered, for if we could not truly shore our lives then at least we always shored a soul, did we not? That is the only thing, despite all the masks and mirrors and whatever it was we thought we were. So many things we could not shore until now. Now I can shore with you the most precious thing of all . . . I will shore my death. Come to me and shore my death. Yes, closer. Do not think about the blood, it is both of ours. Now even closer. See how your blood flows with mine.*

Your blood is inside me.

*And yours in me. We shore a soul, my brother. We shore a soul.*

Adelaide.

Allon.

SILENCE.

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# GHOST STORIES FOR THE DEAD

By Thomas Ligotti

That faint light in each of us which dates back to before our birth, to before all births, is what must be protected if we want to rejoin that remote glory from which we shall never know why we were separated. --E. M. Cioran

## The New Blackness

It isn't like that of an incessant night, the kind poked into only now and then by a few abandoned lights on a lonely street; nor is it like that of the drab trousers and matching jacket filled out by a stranger met on such a night. It isn't even what remains after a tricky wind snuffs the tiny hysteria of a match-flame which, on request, is offered by this stranger. Not like the shadows creased into the stranger's face grinning in the flamelight; not like the sudden emptiness his weapon-weighted hand inflicts. The double negative night-within-night of the stranger's car trunk is not remotely like it.

It is absolutely, when all is considered, not anything like the dimness of the basement where the stranger detains his first victim, nor like the blindness with which he slowly and with regrettable invention afflicts this victim. Not like it too is the gloom of an attic where a second victim, starving for days, feasts upon decomposing birds, which the stranger stealthily traps and laboriously defeathers before the eyes of his famished victim. Bound to a chair within the shuttered shed behind ruined apartments, a third victim ultimately discovers that twelve dense nights of radical, though very amateur, surgery does not even come close to it. And other victims, far too numerous to mention, experience various shades and types of lightlessness that are equally unlike the new blackness of their future.

For the new blackness keeps no secrets, and the new blackness

touches without pain. In it there is nothing to know or remember about who you once might have been. Which of the stranger's victims were you? Fortunately such troubling issues cannot raise themselves when there is no one left to care one way or another. Perhaps you were even that shabby madman himself, who saved his worst and most reliable torments to propel his own life into the mercies of the new blackness.

Is he there with you? You with him?

I am glad I cannot see your faces.

## The New Silence

There is no preparation for it. Even the absence of an expected, a painfully desired, sound is an absence of infinitely grosser dimensions. The telephone—keeping stern vows, its coiled throat in knots—this supremely indifferent device and the sound it doesn't make can merely hint at that higher absence. Of course such hints are restricted to certain peak phases of desolation suffered by certain imaginations, ones without prayer of defense. Remember those rooms so stale, so dim that the dust seems to glitter with a final crackling luminescence precedent to ultimate gloom. Why doesn't that filthy thing ring! What lunatics people sometimes choose for their first serious fall into human affection. Ring, you infernal machine, unspeaking heart of hell!

Then it does. Remember its message: tonight in the park, by the far wall (the one with the stone heads on it that look like dragons),

and make it late. So the tones of the tormentor finally get through, with only minor interference from a temperamental receiver. But tonight no spooks within the wires would interfere with their messages. However, the meeting begins strangely. Having apparently arrived first, he huddles in the ample shadows of the wall with the heads of stone. Only his voice seems to have kept the appointment, saying: closer, come closer. He will not comply with even the politest request to move out into the moonlight, no matter how frightened someone is, no matter how much someone needs to be reassured that it's really him crouching there. For by now anyone could tell that the voice is a fantastic imitation, and when the imposter does finally shake off the shadows and steps forth, someone is sorry for ever wanting her poorest secret wish granted. And now every sound seems the maddening drip of oceans of evil, blasphemy cooed near the ear of a blood sacrifice, a roaring sweat that ultimately evaporates into the sweet nothing of the new silence.

For in the new silence no voice deceives you, and in the new silence you cannot hear yourself weep. All voices are one in the new silence. You must know now what it was he did to you and later to himself. You must now speak to each other in the language of the new silence.

So who was he? And who now are you?

I am glad I cannot hear your answer.

#### The Old Nonsense and the New

How serious was the old nonsense? How terrible was it? How sad? These seem ridiculous questions now, but at the time never are. For at just the right moment they can seize the brain and squeeze it like something gone soft in the sun. And even when the sun is at its height, night may fall; even when golden light leans over a nice clean city. Indeed, from the lofty

vantage of a forty-third floor everything looks especially polished—sterling streets, dazzling semiprecious sidewalks, windows locked diamond-wise into the other big buildings spreading out there for miles. What a promising place this is! Here everything is possible and nothing otherwise. No likelihood not leading to success, no unlikelihood linked to catastrophe, even for the newest comer loitering two score and three stories above Terra Incognitaville.

And though this hallway is long and quiet and empty, there is still no loneliness. There, look behind, a door is opening, the one leading to that supply room. Turn around, the man sneaking out of that room doesn't appear as if he has any business being up here. Then again, maybe he too is simply intent on staring out the window and dreaming about the future. But he walks right past the window and, in passing, sends someone crashing through it with just one good shove of the shoulder. Forty-three floors is a long way to fall. And in those last screaming moments someone wonders how anyone could be duped by all this ludicrous glitter, how anyone could bear confronting the face of a world that writhes in darkness without for a moment relaxing its blinding and inexcusable smile. How easily the old nonsense leads us on and, with neither warnings nor answers, delivers us into a nonsense that seems so different, so new.

For the new nonsense promises no punchlines or apologies, and the new nonsense peals itself back to reveal nothing within. No one is even left to know that nothing is there. How did you manage to take leave of that twinkling city without going anyplace? After you finished falling, where did you land?

Where are you now? Where did you go?

I am glad your responses do not make sense in those dreams I have of you.

#### Tales of the New Dream

In the new dream the dead may not rest very long. Sometimes their rightful blackness is revoked, deserved silence foreclosed, their blissful sense of nothing cut off at closing time. And now these faithful patrons of annihilation, loyal customers of the abyss, these quiet tenants of paradise are thrown out on their ear like lowlife riffraff booted from a respectable establishment. Back down to earth, you wretches! Having no place else to spend eternity, they try to make the best, in other words the worst of it.

Even now Mr. Benedict Griggs, founding member of the Congenial Gents, holds the attention of his fellow clubmen, including the Reverend Penny, with a hair-raising anecdote from his visit to America: how he wandered, quite without intention, into that slatternly district of a large New England city where the notorious "sad scientist" murders had occurred; and how this drunkard, a somewhat lengthy knife in hand, weaved up to him to ask assistance and a few helpful directions home. Home, home. Help me home! was all the wobbling souse said. And upon noticing that this weaver and wobbler had, in fact, no eyes in his head, Mr. Griggs credited the spectre with thereupon vanishing before his own. The entire episode merely "put quite a scare" into the rather fortunate Griggs. For others, depend on it, will have much more put into them!

Others may not be able to tell their friends, as just have Jamie Lempkovitch and his girl Lisa Ann Neff, that they were only grabbed by a pair of foul maniacs, one male

and one female, who emerged from the sod in New Burnstow Park as if from the gentle surface of a pond. Others may have to leave behind more than their shoes and an old blanket when they make a getaway from these ravenous revenants, assuming anyone at all gets away next time the hideous couple appear. Others may not be as lucky!

And parallel to the small-town fame of the New Burnstow Park haunting are those metropolitan legends currently circulating anent an urban apparition that "flies into its victim's face," though only on the darkest downtown nights. And if this sky-diving shade finds a face it likes, in other words hates, it just may decide NOT TO FLY OUT AGAIN.

For in the new dream such beings—wrenched from eternity and returned to earth—are capable of anything from indiscretion to atrocity. Those who have suffered most know how to inflict it best—it's a law of the universe. The suicides, the murdered . . . the unfulfilled, the broken-hearted: veterans of extraordinary suffering and mercenaries of its perpetuation.

These are my mind's eyes, I who have no eyes. These are my mind's mind, I who am not mind. I am bereft of traits, bankrupt of qualities. The riches of the dead are extravagant next to my destitute estate. I have nothing but my immortality; and now, desiring or not, they will have it too.

And I am glad I cannot know them.

But I am even gladder they cannot know me.

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# STUDIES IN HORROR

By Thomas Ligotti

## TRANSCENDENT HORROR

Those bells ringing on the mist-covered mountain signify that the Master of the Temple is dead. The fact of the matter is that the monks there finally killed him.

It seems that a few years ago the Master of the Temple began to exhibit some odd and very unpleasant forms of behavior. He apparently lost all sense of earthly decorum, even losing control over his own body. Once an extra head sprouted from the side of the Master's neck, and this ugly little thing started to issue all sorts of commands and instructions to the monks which only their lofty sense of decency and order prevented them from carrying out. Eventually the Master of the Temple was confined to a small room in an isolated part of the monastery. There, this once-wise and beloved teacher was looked after like an animal. For several years the monks put up with the noises he made, the divers shapes he took. Finally, they killed him.

It is whispered among students of enlightenment that one may achieve a state of being in which enlightenment itself loses all meaning, with the consequence that one thereby becomes subject to all manner of strange destinies.

And the monks? After the assassination, they scattered in all directions. Some hid out in other monasteries, while others went back to live among the everyday inhabitants of this earth. But it wasn't as if they could escape their past by fleeing it, no more than they could rid themselves of their old master by killing him.

For even after the death of his material self, the Master of the Temple sought out those who were once under his guidance; and upon these unhappy students he now be-

stowed, somewhat insistently, his terrible illumination.

## GOTHIC HORROR

The room in the tower seemed to have closed in upon him while he slept, so he measured it off again and found its dimensions to be unchanged. His mind still uneasy, he measured it a second time, and then a third. Then he awoke and measured it off a fourth time in the room in the tower. "I am measuring my own coffin," he whispered to himself while staring intently at the splotted stones of the floor.

Once again he examined every bare corner of his cell. Then he wandered over to the low, handleless door—shaped like an arch—and, laying his cheek against the heavy, splintered wood, he squinted through the tiny openings in the iron grill, surveying the circular corridor of the tower. First he gazed in one direction and then, shifting over to the opposite side of the grill, in the other. Both directions offered the same view: cell door after cell door, each with an armed guard beside it, each progressively shrinking in the circular perspective of the corridor. It was the uppermost level of the castle's highest tower, a quiet place when all the prisoners were at rest. Then a tight-lipped moan broke the silence, waking him a second time from a second sleep. He measured off the dimensions of his cell once more, examining every bare corner, then surveyed the circular corridor through the tiny openings of the iron grill.

Once again he wandered over to the arch-shaped window of his prison cell. This aperture, the only means of escape aside from the low door, was constructed to include four pairs of sharp metal spikes: two pairs projecting from the right

and left sides, two closing it from its top and bottom, and all forming a kind of cross whose parts did not quite join together. But these pointed impediments notwithstanding, there remained a perilous descent groundward. No means for securing either grip or foothold crucial for such a climb were offered by the castle's outer walls, nor was there any possibility of concealment, even, one might say especially, during the darkest of the castle's watchful nights. Beyond the window was a lofty view of sunlit mountains, blue sky, rustling forest, a seemingly endless tableau of nature which in other circumstances might have been considered sublime. In the present circumstances, the mountains and forests, perhaps the sky itself, seemed populated with human enemies and natural obstacles which made the mere dream of escape an impossibility.

Someone was now shaking him, and he awoke. It was the dead of night. Outside the window a bright crescent moon was fixed in the blackness. Within the room were two guards and a hooded figure holding a lamp. One of the guards pinned the dreamer to the floor, while the other reached underneath his ragged shirt, relieving him of a hidden weapon he had recently formed out of a fragment from one of the stone walls in the tower room. "Don't worry," the guard said, "we've been watching you." Then the hooded figure waved the lamp toward the doorway and the prisoner was carried out, his feet dragging over the dark stones of the floor.

From the room in the tower they descended—by means of countless stone staircases and long, torchlit passages—to the deepest part of the castle far underground. This area was a complex of vast chambers, each outfitted from its cold, earthen floor to its lofty, almost indiscernible ceiling with a formidable array of devices. In addition to the incessant echoes of an icy seepage dripping from above, the

only other distinguishable sound was the creaking of this incredible system of machinery, with the refrain now and then of an open-mouthed groan.

His body was put in harness and hoisted so that the tips of his toes barely grazed the floor. The hooded figure, through a sequence of signals, directed the proceedings. During a lull in his agony, the prisoner once again tried to explain to his persecutors their error—that he was not who they thought he was, that he was suffering another man's punishment.

"Are you certain of that?" asked the hooded figure, speaking in an almost kindly tone of voice which he had never used before.

At these words, a look of profound confusion appeared on the prisoner's face, one quite distinct from previous expressions of mere physical torment. And although no new manipulations had been employed, his entire body became grotesquely arched in agony as he emitted a single unbroken scream before collapsing into unconsciousness.

"Waken him," ordered the hooded figure.

They tried, but his body still hung motionless from the ropes, hunched and twisting in its harness. He had already been revived for the last time, and his dreams of measurements and precise dimensions would no longer be disturbed, lost as they now were in a formless nonsense of nothingness.

## EXOTIC HORROR

He had lost his guide—or else had been abandoned by this seething, wiry native of the city—and now he was wandering through strange streets alone. The experience was not entirely an unwelcome one. From the first instant he became aware of the separation, things became more . . . interesting. Perhaps this transformation had begun even in the moments preceding a full awareness of his situation: the narrow entranceway



of a certain street or the shadowed spires of a certain structure appeared as mildly menacing to the prophetic edges of his vision, pleasantly threatening. Now his full vision was of an infinitely more wary scene, and a truly foreign one.

It was near sundown and all the higher architectures—the oddly curving roofs, the almost tilting peaks—were turned into anonymous forms with razor-sharp outlines by the low brilliance in the west. And these angular monuments, blocking the sun, covered the streets below with a thick layer of shadows, so that, even though a radiant blue sky continued to burn above, down here it was already evening.

The torpid confusion of the streets, the crudely musical clatter of alien sounds, became far more mysterious without the daylight and without his guide. It was as if the city had annexed the shadows and expanded under the cover of darkness, as if it were celebrating incredible things there, all sorts of fabulous attractions. Golden lights began to fill windows and to fall against the crumbling mortar of old walls.

His attention was now drawn to a low building at the end of the street, and, avoiding any thought which might diminish his sense of freedom, he entered its lamplit doorway.

The place was one of indefinite character and intention. Stepping inside, he received a not unwelcoming glance from a man who was adjusting some objects on a shelf across the room, and who turned briefly to look over his shoulder at the foreign visitor. At first this man, who must have been the proprietor, was barely noticeable, for the color and texture of his attire somehow caused him to blend, chameleon-like, into the surrounding decor. The man became apparent only after showing his face, but after he turned away he retreated back into the anonymity from which he had been momentarily summoned by the intrusion of a customer.

Otherwise there was no one else in the shop, and, left unbothered by its invisible proprietor, he browsed freely among the shelves.

And what merchandise they held. True curiosities in a thousand twisting shapes were huddled together on the lower shelves, met one's gaze at eye level, and leered down from dim and dusty heights. Some of them, particularly the very small ones, but also the very largest ones crouched in corners, could not be linked to anything he had ever seen. They might have been trinkets for strange gods, toys for monsters. His sense of freedom intensified. Now he was nearly overcome with the feeling that something unheard of could very possibly enter his life, something which otherwise might have passed him by. His sensation was one of fear, but fear that was charged with the blackest passion. He now felt himself as the victim of some vast conspiracy that involved the remotest quarters of the cosmos, countless plots all converging upon him. Hidden portents were everywhere and his head was now spinning: first with vague images and possibilities, then with . . . darkness.

What place he later occupied is impossible to say. Underground, perhaps, beneath the shop with the peculiar merchandise. Thenceforward it was always dark, except on those occasions when his keepers would come down and shine a light across the full length of his monstrous form. (The victim of a horrible magic, the guide would whisper.) But the shining light never disturbed his dreams, since his present shape was equipped with nothing that functioned as eyes.

Afterward money would be collected from the visiting spectators, who were sworn to secrecy before they were allowed to witness this marvel. Still later they would be assassinated to insure the inviolable condition of their vow. But how much more fortunate were they, meeting their deaths with a fresh sense of that exotic wonder which they had travelled so far to expe-

rience, than he, for whom all distances and alien charm had long ago ceased to exist in the cramped and nameless incarceration in which he had found a horrible home.

### SPECTRAL HORROR

One may be alone in the house and yet not alone.

There are so many rooms, so many galleries and corridors, all laid out level upon level, a strange succession of mysteries, so many places where a peculiar quiet resounds with secrets. Every object and surface of the house seems darkly vibrant, a medium for distant agitations which are felt but not always seen or heard: dusty chandeliers send a stirring through the air above, walls ripple within patterns of raised filigree, grimy portraits shudder inside their gilded frames. And even if the light throughout much of the house has grown stale and become a sepia haze, it nevertheless remains a haze in ferment, a fidgeting aura that envelops this museum of tremulous antiquities.

So one cannot feel alone in such a house, especially when it is a remote edifice which clings to the very edge of the land and hovers above a frigid ocean. Through an upper window is a view of coastal earth falling away into gray, heaving waters. The lower windows of the house all look into the rustling depths of a garden long overgrown and sprouting in prolific tangles. A narrow path leads through this chaotic luxuriance, ending at the border of a dense wood which is aroused to life by a mild but perpetual wind. Ocean, garden, woods—surroundings possessed by a visible turbulence which echoes the unseen tremors within the house itself. And when night masks the movements of this landscape, it is the stars that shiver around a livid, palpitant moon.

Yet one may not believe there is an exchange of influence between the house and the world around it. And still there is a presence that

pervades each as though there were no walls to divide them.

From the moment one arrives at such a house there seems to be something moving in the background of its sceries, a hidden company whose nature is unknown. No true peace can establish itself in these rooms, however long they have remained alone with their own emptiness, abandoned to lie dormant and dreamless. Throughout the most innocent mornings and unclouded afternoons there endures a kind of restless pulling at appearances, an awkward or expert fussing with the facade of objects. In the night a tide of shadows invades the house, submerging its rooms in a darkness which allows a greater freedom to these fitful maneuverings.

And perhaps there is a certain room toward the very summit of the house, a room where one may sense how deeply the house has penetrated into a far greater estate: a landscape which is without boundaries either above or below, an infinite architecture whose interior is as tortuous and vast as its exterior. The room is long and large and features a row of double doors along the full length of one wall, doors which lead out to a narrow terrace overlooking the ocean and staring straight into the sky. And each door is composed of a double row of windowpanes, opening the room to the images of the expansive world outside it and allowing the least possible division between them.

There are no working light fixtures in this room, so that it necessarily shares in the luminous moods of the day or night beyond the windows. Discovering this chamber on a certain overcast afternoon, one settles into an apartment that itself is hung with clouds and enveloped by dull twilight for endless hours. And yet the room appears to gain all the depth that the day has lost: whereas the sky has been foreshortened by a low ceiling of soft gray clouds, the dim corners and shaded furnishings reach into immense realms, great

wells and hollows beyond vision. Certainly the echoes one hears must be resonating in places outside that room, which muffles one's movements with its thick and densely figured carpet, its plumply upholstered chairs, and its maze of tables, cases, and cabinets in dark, weighty wood.

For in this constricted setting, echoes emerge which only a void of supernatural dimensions could create. Yet at first they may sound like the reverberant groaning of those clouds in which a storm slumbers. And then they may seem to mimic the hissing of the ocean as it swirls about the broken land below. Slowly, however, the echoes distinguish themselves from these natural sounds and attain their own voice: a voice that carries across incredible distances, a voice whose words come to lose their stratum of sense, a voice that is dissolving in to sighs and sobs and chattering insanity. Every niche, every pattern, every shadow of the room is eloquent with this voice. And one's attention may be distracted by this strange soliloquy, this uncanny music. Thus, one may not notice, as afternoon approaches nightfall, that something else is present in the room, something which has been secreted out of sight and waits to rise up in the shape of a revelation, to rise up like a cry in one's own throat.

Such phenomena may be quite severe in their effects, leaving their witness in a perilous orientation between two worlds, one of which is imposing its madness and its mysteries on the other. We feel the proximity of a great darkness beyond earthly reason, of a cryptic land of dreams whose shadows mingle with our own, breathing their intense life into the airless world of the mundane. For a time we are content to reside within that metaphysical twilight and delve deep in to its hues. Long exasperated by questions without answers, by answers without consequences, by truths which change nothing, we

learn to become intoxicated by the mood of mystery itself, by the odor of the unknown. We are entranced by the subtle scents and wavering reflections of the unimaginable.

In the beginning it is not our intention to seek order within madness or to give a name to certain mysteries. We are not concerned with creating a system out of the strangeness of that house. What we seek—in all its primitive purity—is the company of the spectral. But ultimately, as if possessed by some fatal instinct, we succumb to the spirit of intrigue and attempt to find a drab focus for the amorphous glories we have inherited.

We are like the man who, by some legacy of fate, has come to stay in another old house, one very much like our own. After passing a short time within the cavernous and elaborate solitude of the place, he becomes a spectator to strange sights and sounds. He then begins to doubt his sanity, and at last flees the advancing shadows of the house for the bright shelter of a nearby town. There, amid the good society of the local citizens, he learns the full history of the house. (It seems that long ago some tragedy occurred, an irreparable melodrama that has continued to be staged many years after the deaths of the actors involved.) Others who have lived in the house have witnessed the same eerie events, and its most recent guest is greatly relieved by this knowledge. Faith in his mental soundness has been triumphantly restored: it is the house itself which is mad.

But this man need not have been so comforted. If the spectral drama could be traced to definite origins, and others have been audience to it, this is not to prove that all testimony regarding the house is unmarked by madness. Rather, it suggests a greater derangement, a conspiracy of unreason implicating a plurality of lunatics, a delirium that encompasses past and present, houses and minds, the claustral cellars of the soul and the endless

spaces outside it.

For we are the specters of a madness that surpasses ourselves and hides in mystery. And though we search for sense throughout endless rooms, all we may find is a voice whispering from a mirror in a house that belongs to no one.

### UNREAL HORROR

One must speak of the imposter city.

There is never a design to arrive in this place. Destination is always elsewhere. Only when this destination is reached too soon, or by means of a strange route, may suspicions arise. Then everything requires a doubting gaze.

Yet everything also seems above sensible question. On the occasion that one has set out for a great metropolis, here the very site of anticipation is found. Its monuments spread wondrously across bright skies, despite an unseasonable mist which may obscure its earthward landmarks.

But here, one soon observes, nightfall is out of pace. Perhaps it will occur unexpectedly early, bringing a darkness of an unfamiliar quality and duration. Throughout these smothering hours there may be sounds that press strangely upon the fringes of sleep.

The following day belongs forever to a dim season. And all the towers of the great metropolis have withered in a mist which now lies upon low buildings and has drawn a pale curtain across the sky.

Through the mist, which hovers thick and stagnant, the city projects the features of its true face. Drab, crumpled buildings appear along streets which twist without pattern like cracks between the pieces of a puzzle. Dark houses bulge; neither stone nor wood, their surface might be of decaying flesh, breaking away at the slightest touch.

Some of these structures are mere facades propped up by a void. Others falsify their interiors with crude scenes painted where windows

should be. And where a true window appears, there is likely to be an arm hanging out of it, a stuffed and dangling arm with a hand whose fingers are too many or too few.

Here and there scraps of debris hop about with no wind to guide them. These are the only things that seem to move in these streets, though there is a constant scraping noise that follows one's steps. If one pauses for a moment to look into a narrow space between buildings, something may be seen dragging itself along the ground, or perhaps it has already laid itself across the street, obstructing the way that leads out of the city. This figure is only that of a dead-eyed dummy; yet, when someone tries to step over the thing, its mouth suddenly drops open. At the time this is the best the city can do—a sham of menace that has no life and deceives no one.

Only later—when, in disgust, one has left behind this place of feeble impostures—will the true menace make itself known. And it begins when familiar surroundings inspire, on occasion, moments of doubt. Then places must verify themselves, objects are asked to prove their solidity, a searching hand makes inquiries upon the surface of a window.

Afterward there are intense seizures of suspicion that will not abate. Everything seems to be on the verge of disclosing its unreality and drifting off into the shadows. And the shadows themselves collapse and slide down rooftops, trickle down walls and into the streets like black rain. One's own eyes stare absently in the mirror; one's mouth drops open in horror.

### DEMONIC HORROR

And even in the darkness they seemed to linger, half-tone freaks parading translucent until they faded with the dawn. Eyes open or closed, the lamp glowing or not, he felt that they were threatening to pass over the threshold and manifest themselves on the other side of

sleep. Their faces would begin to darken the air, and then dissolve. The light in his room momentarily molded itself into fantastic limbs that slipped in and out of the glare of his eyeglasses. A draft grew thick and foul, gusting briefly against his cheek.

And in the morning he drifted pale from his home, another night exacted from him by disfigured masters, a little more of himself sliding into the black mirror of dreams.

And at first he would regain some of his losses of the previous night, but less of his own life was being returned to his possession. Their presence was now with him, an invisible mist surrounding him and distorting his senses. The streets he walked seemed to slant beneath his feet; a scene in the distance would be twisted out of all earthly shape, suggesting the remote latitudes of nightmare. Voices whispered to him from the depths of vertiginous stairwells and the far corners of long narrowing hallways. Somehow the ravelling clouds carried a charnel odor which pursued him back to the door of his home and into his sleep.

And into the dreams he fell, helplessly skittering down slanted streets, tumbling down stairwells, caught in a mesh of moldering clouds. Then the faces began to float above him, sharp fingers reaching into his flesh. He screamed himself awake. But even in the darkness they seemed to linger.

And finally he was chased from his home and into the streets, walking ceaselessly until daybreak. He became a seeker of crowds, but the crowds thinned and abandoned him. He became a seeker of lights, but the lights grew strange and led him into desolate places.

And now the lights were reflected in the black, shining surface of wetted streets. Every house in that neighborhood was a battered, cracking vessel of darkness; every tree was perfect stillness. There was not another soul to companion him, and the moon was a

fool.

And they were there with him. He could feel their scabby touch, though he could not see them. As long as he walked, as long as he was awake, he would not see them. But someone was pulling at his sleeve, a frail little man with eyeglasses.

It was only an elderly gentleman who wanted to be shown the way along these dim streets, to exchange a few remarks with this grateful stranger, one so eager for company on that particular evening. Finally the soft-voiced old man tipped his hat and continued slowly down the street. But he had walked only a few steps when he turned and said: "Do you like your demon dreams?"

And into the dreams he fell . . . and forever.

## MACABRE HORROR

To others he always tried to convey the impression that he lived in a better place than he actually did, one far more comfortable and far less decayed. "If they could only see what things are really like, rotting all around me."

Feeling somewhat morose, he closed his eyes and sank down into gloomy reflections. He was sitting in a plump, stuffed chair which was sprouting in several places through the worn upholstery.

"Would you like to know how it feels to be dead?" he imagined a voice asking him.

"Yes, I would," he imagined answering.

A rickety but rather proud looking gentleman—this is how he imagined the voice—led him past the graveyard gates. (And they were flaking with age and squeaked in the wind, just as he always imagined they would.) The quaintly tilting headstones, the surrounding grove of vaguely stirring trees, the soft gray sky overhead, the cool air faintly fragrant with decay: "Is this how it is?" he asked hopefully. "Late afternoon in a perpetual autumn?"

"Not exactly," the gentleman answered. "Please keep watching."

The gentleman's instruction was intended ironically, for now there was no longer anything to behold: no headstones, no trees or sky, nor was there a fragrance of any kind to be blindly sensed.

"Is this how it is, then?" he asked once more. "A body frozen in blackness, a perpetual night in winter?"

"Not precisely," the gentleman replied. "Allow your vision to become used to the darkness."

Then it began to appear to him, glowing with a glacial illumination, a subterranean or extrastellar phosphorescence. Initially, the radiant corpse he saw seemed to be in a stiffly upright position; but he had no way of calculating his angle of perspective, which may actually have been somewhere directly above the full length of the body, rather than frontally facing its height. No less than its mold-spotted clothes, the flesh of the cadaver was in gauzy tatters, lips shrivelled to a powdery smudge on a pale shroud of a face, eyes dried up in the shells of their sockets, hair a mere sprinkling of dust. And now he imagined the feeling of death as one previously beyond his imagination. This feeling was simply that of an eternally prolonged itching sensation.

"Yes, of course," he thought, "this is how it really must be, an incredible itch when all the fluids are gone and ragged flesh chafes in ragged clothes. A terrible itching and nothing else, nothing worse." Then, out loud, he asked the old gentleman: "Is this, then, how it truly feels to be dead? Only this and not the altogether unimaginable horror I've always feared it would be?"

"Is that what you would now have, this true knowledge?" asked a voice, though it was not the voice of the rickety and proud looking old man he had first imagined. This was another voice altogether, a strange voice which promised: "Then the true knowledge

shall be yours."

A long time passed before his body was found, its bony fingers digging into the tattered material of a plump, stuffed armchair, its skin already crumbling and covered with the room's dust. His discoverers were some acquaintances who wondered what had become of him. And as they stood for a few numbed moments around the site of his seated corpse, a few of them absent-mindedly gave their collared necks or shirt-sleeved arms a little scratch.

Along with the trauma this unexpected discovery imposed, there was the lesser shock of the dead man's run-down home, which was not at all the place his acquaintances imagined they would find. But somehow it continued to be the better place of their imagination when—on autumn afternoons or winter nights—they recollected the thing they found in the chair, or simply reflected on the phenomenon of death itself. Often these musings would be accompanied by a tiny scratch or two just behind the ears or at the base of the neck.

## PUPPET HORROR

The one sitting all cock eyed was telling me things. Of course its soft and carefully sewn mouth was not moving, none of their mouths move unless I make them. Nonetheless I can still understand them when they have something to say, which is actually quite often. They have lived through things no one would believe.

And they are all over my room. This one is on the floor, lying flat on its little stomach with its head propped within the crux of its two hands, a tiny foot waving in the air behind. That one is lazily sprawled high upon an empty shelf, leaning on its elbow, a thin leg of cloth peaked like a triangle. They are everywhere else too: in the fireplace that I would never light; in my most comfortable chair which they make seem gigantic; even under my bed, a great many of them,

as well as in it. I usually occupy a small stool in the middle of the room, and the room is always quiet. Otherwise it would be difficult to hear their voices, which are faint and slightly hoarse, as might be expected from such throats as theirs.

Who else would listen to them and express what they have been through? Who else could understand their fears, however petty they may seem at times? To a certain degree, then, they are dependent on me. Patiently I attend to histories and anecdotes of existences beyond the comprehension of most. Never, I believe, have I given them reason to feel that the subtlest fluctuations of their anxieties, the least nuance of their cares, have not been accounted for by me and given sympathetic consideration.

Do I ever speak to them of my own life? No; that is, not since a certain incident which occurred some time ago. To this day I don't know what came over me. Absent-mindedly I began confessing some trivial worry, I've completely forgotten what. And at that moment all their voices suddenly stopped, every one of them, leaving an insufferable vacuum of silence.

Eventually they began speaking to me again, and all was as it had been before. But I shall never forget that interim of terrible silence, just as I shall never forget the expression of infinite evil on their faces which rendered me speechless thereafter.

They, of course, continue to talk on and on . . . from ledge and shelf, floor and chair, from under the bed and in it.

### PREHISTORIC HORROR

I cannot imagine how this voice invaded the dream, yet did not belong to it.

"O intelligent life of a fool's future," it said, "hear this song. If only you could gaze with me from this mere rock, this dull slab which is yet a throne to rolling seas and

to the mist which veils a rustling paradise. And beneath those churning waters—the slow fierce music of a dim world of monsters, deep eyes ever-searching. And upon the unpatterned lands—chaotic undulations amidst vines and greenish vapor, the flickering dance of innumerable tails and tongues. And above in the skies smeared over with ashen clouds—leathery wings flapping. O fallen beast, if only you could see all this through my lidless eyes, this sacred world innocent of hope how willingly you would then follow the death of all your empty dreams."

"Innocent of hope, perhaps," I thought upon waking in the darkness. "And yet, O wide-eyed lizard, I would hear you sing something of your pain and your panic. A paradise of prehistory. Indeed. How finely spoken. But a lyric of life all the same—of slime itself, of ooze as such.

"I scorn your eloquence and your world, the poetry of a living oblivion, and now seek a simpler style of annihilation. My hopes remain intact. Your split-tongued words were merely a boorish intrusion on a dream of much deeper things—the Incomparably Remote.

"And now let me close my eyes once again to follow in dreams the backward path far beyond all noise and numbers, falling into that world where I am the brother of silence and share a single face with the void."

But the reptile's voice continues to mock me, night after night.

And it will laugh and rave throughout all the humid nights of history. Until that perfect lid of darkness falls over this world once more.

### NAMELESS HORROR

The place was an old studio. To him it seemed abandoned, yet who knows? Certainly nothing there was in its place—not the broken odds and ends lying about, not the scattered papers, not even the dust. The panes of the skylight were caked with it. Yet who can be

sure? Perhaps there was some imperceptible interval between occupation and abandonment, some fine phase of things which he was simply unable to detect at the moment. He stooped and picked up a few of the wrinkled papers, which appeared to be drawings. Now a little rain began drooling down the panes of the skylight.

The drawings. He shuffled a stack of them page after page before his eyes. So intricate, everything in them was made of tiny, tiny hairs or little veins, insect veins. There were shapes: he could not tell what they were supposed to be, but something about the shape of the shapes, their twistings and the way they flared around, was so horrible. A little rain seeped in through some fine cracks in the windowpanes above; it dripped down and made strange marks on the dusty floor of the old studio.

Someone was coming up the stairs outside the door of the studio. So he hid behind that door, and, when that someone came in, he, without looking back, went out. Tip-toeing down the stairs, running down the street in the rain.

He was walking now, and the rain was sluicing vigorously in the gutters. And something else that he saw was in there too. It looked like the tail of an animal, but a very intricate tail. It was being dragged slowly along by the run-off in the gutter, and it made weird wriggling movements. When it was farther away, the intricacies of the object—those involved patterns in which he thought he saw a face smiling so peacefully—were no longer discernible, and he felt relieved.

But the rain was coming down even harder now, so he retreated into a shelter along the street. It was just a little room with a wooden bench, open on one side and rain running off its roof, long watery ropes of rain that were swinging a little in the wind. Very damp in there, and the frayed edges of shadows waving on the three walls. Damp smell, with something else too,

some unsavory enigma about the place, something in its very outlines, its contours. What was it that happened in here, and could that be a little blood over there?

The bench where he had sat down was now gleaming with dampness under moonlight. At the other end, almost entirely absorbed into the dark little corner, was a bent figure, almost folded in half. It groaned and moved a little. Finally it straightened up, and its intricately tangled hair came tumbling down into the moonlight. Along the slick bench it slid, dragging itself and its rags slowly to his side. He, on the other hand, could not move an inch, not a hair.

Then, from somewhere within all that intricacy, a pair of eyes opened, and a pair of lips. And they said to him: "Let me tell you what my name is."

But when the figure leaned over, smiling so placidly, those shapeless lips had to whisper their words into the cold damp ear of a corpse.

## NIGHTMARE HORROR

No one knows how entrance is made; no one recalls by what route such scenes are arrived at. There might be a soft tunnel of blackness, possibly one without arching walls or solid flooring, a vague stream-lined enclosure down which one floats toward a shadowy terminus. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, a light flares up and spreads, props appear all around, the scenario is laid out and learned in an instant, while that ingress of blackness—that dull old tunnel—is unmemorized. On the other hand, perhaps there is no front door to the dream, no first act to the drama: a gallery of mannikins abruptly wakes and they all take up their roles in mid-speech, without a beginning to go back to.

But the significant thing is not to begin but to continue, not to arrive but to stay. This is the founding condition, the one on which all others are grounded and raised: restriction, incarceration are the



laws of the structure. And this structure, an actual building now, is a strange one; complete in itself, it is not known to be part of a larger landscape, as if perfectly painted mountains had been left without a lake or sky on a wide white canvass. Is it a hospital? Museum? Drab labyrinth of offices? Or just some nameless . . . institution? Whatever it may be outside, inside—for those who have important business there—it is very late, and the time has somehow slipped by for a crucial appointment.

In which room was it supposed to take place? Is this even the right section of the building, the correct floor? All the hallways look the same—without proper lighting or helpful passersby—and none of the rooms is numbered. But numbers are of no assistance, going from empty room to empty room is futile. That vital meeting has already been missed and nothing in the world can make up for this loss.

Finally, a kind of climax is reached in the shadows beneath a stairway, where one has taken refuge from the consequences of failure.

And within this apparent haven there is an entirely new development: multitudes of huge spiders hang in drooping webs above and around you. Your presence has disturbed them and they begin to move, their unusual bodies maneuvering about. But however horrible they may be, you know that you need them.

For they are the ones who show you the way out; it is their touch which guides you and reminds you of how to take leave of this torture. Everyone recalls this final flight from the nightmare; everyone knows how to scream.

### OCCULT HORROR

Gruesome fate.

And five candles burned the whole time, at the five points of the star. They never went out. The man in the middle was tall, his forehead taut. His shirt was once

white but had yellowed to reflect the moon in the dark sky above the twisted trees outside the window. Inside there was only that great empty room with the single star, the five candles, and the man.

Also there was the book, which the man knelt to read at the center of the star. *Book of the Damned*. And it told of other worlds, and the man summoned them. He had visions, visions in the smoke of the candles, in the light of the moon which shone on the dull dark floor of the room. The patterns on the walls swirled in the candlelight and in the moonlight.

Worlds bloomed and withered, spun and stopped, flourished and decayed. In the smoke of the candles. But they were all the same. All of them had different colors, just as the one he knew, and different seasons: each beat like a hunted heart.

"No more blood," he cried, choking. "These worlds merely mimic my own." And again: "No more blood!"

The candles, the moon, the patterns on the wall, and the howling wind heard; and all agreed to welcome him to this other world, which was already theirs.

Now it would be his.

And the flames barely fluttered as he collapsed into the star, his face so white above his yellow shirt and beneath the yellow moon. A beautiful, bloodless white.

How foolish they were who thought he was dead: who buried him in that sticky earth, so moist and warm in summer. And dark as blood.

### DREAMWORLD HORROR

Illusions struggle with illusions.

And in the expansive silence of that landscape nothing is settled or certain, not excepting the image of infinity presented by the stars and blackness that seem to spread immensely above. For below, one may vow, extends another blackness, an endless ebony plateau whose surface is like polished stone. There the

sky would appear to have thrown down stars, setting them within the shining darkness of the lower world so that it might contemplate from afar these glittering relics, scintillant cast-offs from its ancient treasure, the brilliant debris of its dreams.

Thus, both above and below one may see the flickering of these luminous motes, quivering bodies held captive in the unbroken web of blackness. And the abysmal web itself seems to tremble; for nothing there is at peace or secure in its nature. Even the emptiness that separates the starlight from its reflection upon the great glassy plain is an imitation void. For, having made the level land its mirror, the sky has gazed too long and too deeply, reaching into itself and embracing its own visions, saturating the distance between the thing and its simulacrum. All space is virtual; the infinite is illusory. There, in that landscape, a dimension has died, annihilating depth and leaving behind only a lustrous image which seems to float far and wide upon the infinite surface of a black ocean.

And it is said that this ocean is itself merely a starry phantasm glimpsed in certain eyes . . . eyes that may be seen as one wanders the streets of strange cities . . . eyes that are like two stars laid deep in a black mirror.

### NIHILISTIC HORROR

After tabulating our number of days on this earth, we would still have to multiply this sum several times in order to take into account our dreams—those days inside our nights. Several more lifetimes must therefore be added, including those in which the dead continue to live and those in which the living are dead; those in which such trivial occurrences as an innocent laugh acquire a profound meaning and those in which the most awesome events have none at all; those which are made very strange by supernatural powers and those in which magic itself seems commonplace; those in which we play ourselves

and those in which we seem to be someone else; those in which everything appears frightening and harmful and those in which indifference is the single note that sounds through the dream.

These contradictions make our dreams seem negligible, and this is what enables them to be ignored in the tabulation of our days.

But there are still those dreams which are waiting for others to come along, whose terms and conditions will cancel them out. These are the leftover dreams, our dark days, which have yet to fall victim to mathematics, and they are the only ones that count for anything. And it is the same with our waking days. Only a few of those escape nullification by contradiction, that process of cancellation which is going on all the time.

In any case, neither dreams nor days ever survive long before their counterparts step up and annihilate them. It is quite possible that, in our last moments, there will be nothing left which we might look back on as a lifetime.

But will this nothingness itself endure, or will it too be cancelled out by some inviolable and unsuspected form of being, terminating at last in a kind of double oblivion?

### ORDER OF ILLUSION (from p. 34)

he saw the gyration of shadows upon the summit of the hills. How could they persist in their madness, he wondered. Nevertheless, for reasons beyond explanation, he joined them.

And they welcomed him, for they could see the ordeals he had undergone, the powers he had gained. He, on the other hand, felt nothing; but he easily devoured all the honors held out to him: these were the only sustenance left which satisfied his hunger for mockery.

Now his are the crimson hands which hold aloft the golden blade, his the face behind the mask with seven eyes. And he is the one who stands in shining robes before the massive idol of moons, trembling the while with wonder.

# ORDER OF ILLUSION

By Thomas Ligotti

It seemed to him that the old mysteries had been made for another universe, and not the one he came to know. Yet there was no doubt that they had once deeply impressed him. Intoxicated by their wonder, by raw wonder itself, he might never have turned away from the golden blade held aloft by crimson hands, from the mask with seven eyes, the idol of moons, from the ceremony called the Night of the Night, along with other rites of illumination and all the ageless doctrines which derived from their frenzies. How was it they failed him? When was the first moment he found himself growing impatient with their music and their gyrations, when the first moment he witnessed these mysteries and descended into another kind of wonder?

Before his disillusion was discovered, he walked out on his old sect. He did not waste any time, however, in casting about for a new one. Unfortunately the same, or very similar, problems arose with each of them: they all, in his view, were nullified by their own profoundness and by a collection of mysteries that failed to break the surface of the bottomless soul, failed to place themselves at eye level with things. These mysteries thus condemned all that lay outside of them to triviality, whether deserving of this fate or not. Injustice was their essence and their power. Had these routines of enlightenment actually been intended for a universe not undermined by mockery and confusion? But to bother even with the dream of such a place was useless, especially when he could conceive a pursuit more to the point. This entailed nothing less than the invention of a cult, a solitary one to be sure, better suited to his profane vision.

He set out to locate a site of worship, a place abandoned, old, isolated and decayed. Actually there were many such places to choose from, and by a completely arbitrary means of selection, he soon managed to set-

tle on one of them. This numinous structure—bashed in roof and battered walls—he cluttered with the fetishes of his new creed. These consisted of anything he could find which had a divine aura of disuse, of unfulfillment, hopelessness, disintegration, of grotesque imbecility and senselessness. Dolls with broken faces he put on display in corners and upon crumbling pedestals. Thin, lifeless trees he dug up whole from their natural graves and transplanted into the cracked tiles of the floor's mosaic; then he hung lamps of thick green glass by corroded chains from the ceiling, and the withered branches of the trees were bathed in hues of livid mold. As were the faces of the dolls and those of various mummified creatures, including two human abortions which were set floating in jars at opposite ends of an altar draped with rags. His vestments were also rags, their frayed edges fluttering like dead leaves about to fall. Standing before the altar, he raised his arms over something that smoldered, which was his own dried excrement upon a tarnished plate. He glanced about at the defunct forest of which he was king, at the brittle twisting branches (some of which were adorned with hanging dolls and other things), at all the various objects of refuse he had added to his collection, finally at the green waters of those two occupied jars glowing upon the rags of the altar, and he widened his mouth to speak, and he said . . . nothing. So distracted was he with a gruesome contentment: his old wonder had been ravaged and his hunger for mockery fulfilled.

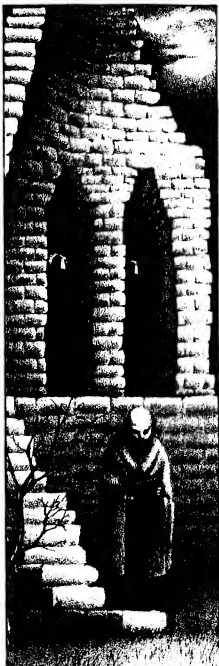
But this contentment did not last, how could it? Illusion throws its invisible shimmer over all things, no matter what level of debasement they have struggled to win. Whatever may appear, sooner or later, will appear in greatness. Thus, gradually, the pathetic, lusterless world he had made, and labored to make low, had

rebelliously elevated itself beyond its surface decrepitude and assumed a kind of grandeur in his eyes. The naked limbs of what had once been trees and now were empty objects, hollow abstractions mocked by the sarcastic verdure of the green lamps, underwent transfiguration to inherit the suppleness of all symbols and the dignity of a dream. Each of the disfigured dolls, vile and insane mimics of the human nightmare, gave up their evil and revealed themselves as the protectors of countless inexpressible mysteries and myriad secret enchantments. And the precocious corpses upon the altar no longer drifted about pointlessly, embalmed in their wombs of foggy glass, but hovered serenely in becalmed fathoms of infinite wonder.

His effort to strip away the finery of objects and events, and to exist only in the balm of desolation, was a failure. The experiment had only resulted in the discovery of a deeper stratum of preciousness in things. And having revealed this substratum, his eyes began to attack its treasures with all their savage wondering. Everything became newly subject to a mockery that was not of his own making, and to an onslaught of confusion that threatened to violate his precious world of death and dolls. But was there perhaps a more profound source of mockery and confusion that could be excavated beneath the deceptive wealth which he had so quickly exhausted? If there was, he did not possess the ambition, at this point, to seek it out. Dropping to the shattered mosaic of the floor, collapsing under the now lovely doll-hung trees, he lay stagnant in ragged robes of despair throughout a full day and late into the night.

But toward the latest hour of evening he was disturbed by distant sounds. He had been away from his old sect so long that at first he did not recognize the peculiar clamor of the ceremony called the Night of the Night. When he walked out into the cold air outside his solitary temple,

(continued on page 32)



# CHARNELHOUSE OF THE MOON

By Thomas Ligotti

Entranced hilarity was perhaps his first but certainly not his only reaction when from a hidden bed of shadows he gazed upon the place and its curious workings. He had journeyed far too far merely for that. And truly novel sensations were rare enough without diluting them in the swill of banal combinations. Much, much more, he had heard, awaited one who would go down from the moon's crystal-dusted mirror of dreams and travel to that flashy mound which stood out from the void like a chunk of fresh meat set redly within a diamond. There, they said with voices thin and fine as the air of imagination, you may roll your eyes in a living mirror and leave your lunar immunity to such things . . . behind. It is our reflecting reservoir, so to speak, where a graveyard has sunk low into the muck. Oh, we envisage it endlessly in our cerebral exploits of the cosmic macabre; but go, go there if you must, and see.

He did see, after arduously strolling across a landscape colored in a rainbow of open wounds, radiant against the blackness that waits beyond the footlights of stark autopsies. With a little skip he leapt over streams, their translucence divided into a veinwork of tributaries, viscous but still chuckling through crow-footed ruts. He was tempted to drink from these, never having refreshed himself with anything so palpable; but this was a minor delight and he could save its savoring as a final consolation should his destination disappoint him in more ways than he could reasonably expect. And here at last in truth it was: the distinguished thing.

It seemed no more than a big box of boards soaring like a mountain where gleaming black clouds roil about the summit. It was cheaply buttressed at its base by long planks which leaned against the

walls like unvigilant watchmen. Other comparisons he could easily have conjured but needed to conserve his imagination for the no doubt inspiring feast inside the amazing structure. He entered unseen amid darkness and confusion and sounds of labor.

Entranced hilarity was perhaps his first but certainly not his only reaction when from a hidden bed of shadows he gazed upon the place and its curious workings. Complex hybrids and cross-breeds of sentiments were born from each strange menage of mind, emotions, and senses. So this was what it was like to live outside the austere atmosphere of the lunar visionary—to, in fact, live at all in any proper sense of the word. The place, to put it plainly and without the evocations of vagueness, was . . . was something quite similar in principal to what a complete outsider's conception of a slaughterhouse might be. The beasts themselves did not make any audible sound, standing uniformly docile, cornered in fragile corrals. To his hearing, however, their very silence seemed a kind of music, a sterile harmony as pure as the white of their hides, the white lines of their elegant necks and glassy manes. And they all remained unspattered despite the gloomy filth that seemed to be everywhere, even rising from the ground as a gray ghost of steam.

Marauding through the greasy haze were huge men who apparently were clad in nothing but long, black, rubbery aprons. Their faces were parodies of divinities of apes. They moved with graceless deliberation (his exact impression was more expansively articulated), as if they were being just adequately manipulated by powers in themselves more stealthy. Still, the pristinely pale creatures obeyed them without a struggle, glancing upward a little

shyly at the last moment when the gory mallet came down and smashed them between the eyes, right below the spot where a spiraled horn projected from their sweatless foreheads. The gods, he imagined, had no uncertain uses for such well-formed cornua. Without delay the butchers separated these appendages from the fallen carcasses. They appeared to snap off easily, like icicles.

He then watched the flaying of the carcasses and the hanging of the hides along the wall like old coats. What royal stoles these would make! he thought, for a monarch of the imagination. And the creature's meat was laid bare: an inner pink as perfect as their outer white. (It was all so exciting, he gasped inwardly in the shadows.) The ideal fare for one not accustomed to gross nourishment. But what a scandal the way the processing was handled, the way hooks came down from high above and brusquely lifted the pretty flesh into the blackness. Was there even a roof to this colosseum of butchery, or did the eye glancing upwards see far over the walls and deep into the old, old well of the abyss? His fair eyelashes fluttered with dreams and curiosity, a cornucopia of universal figures and fancy images. Then his reverie was brought to an end, quite crudely interrupted; and entranced hilarity, leaping toward hysteria, was only a small part of what he felt.

*Well now, look what we got here, brothers,* said one of the big boys in black apron, massaging his meaty and enbristled cheeks in a fairytale parody of thoughtfulness. The others gathered around, some carrying monstrous mallets and others caressing the blades of surgically sharp instruments. They chuckled unambiguously. They nodded. They whispered among themselves. (A simple style is best now.) They watched one of his pale, slender hands wipe something from his taut brow. He then stared at his open hand as though at something he had never seen or imagined. And then

he realized the sort of place he was in: that the filthy glamor of it was just a disguise for another place which was without light or air—a jewel-hard darkness. A place he could never know in the way he really wanted. And he realized what was going to happen to him now. The massive figures hefted their tools, closing in. And he laughed a little, for at that moment entranced hilarity was not entirely absent from his perception of this pageant . . . and the obscure but demanding role he was about to play.

## TEN STEPS TO THIN MOUNTAIN

(continued from page 37)

known about it all along. I hear them discussing it everywhere. Oh, Thin Mountain, yes, Thin Mountain, certainly.

9. On Thin Mountain no one talks about Thin Mountain.

10. The train will be here soon.

## MAIL-CALL (from page 9)

destroy it, but merely put it aside. We have Leiber's own estimation of the word count as 3,000, but that seems to fall within the realm of acceptable error after a lapse of 30 years. As for the title, Leiber writes that the story was "to be titled The Burrowers Beneath." Even though his correspondence with Berglund shows him using "The Lovecraftian Story" like a bona fide title, I find it hard to believe he would have tried writing and marketing a story so-named, especially while Lovecraft was still alive. Sounds to me like an informal working title for a story in progress: you know, I could just imagine John W. Campbell asking Leiber what kind of writing he was doing and Leiber replying, "Well, I have 'The Witchcraft-as-Physics Story' (Conjure Wife), 'The Physics-as-Witchcraft Story' (Gather Darkness) and

(continued on page 41)

# TEN STEPS TO THIN MOUNTAIN

By Thomas Ligotti

1. One day I saw it on a very old map: Thin Mountain. No elevation was noted. In my mind vague images began to form. I set the map aside and closed my eyes. Then there was a sudden commotion, the kind that may start up anyplace, whether on a train rocking along its tracks or just an old bench somewhere. A group of people ran by, waving their arms and making odd noises. What was it that suddenly made me reach for the old map, only to find it was gone? And I just sat there wondering what things were really like on Thin Mountain.

2. No one knows all the legends inspired by Thin Mountain, but here are a few I've recently picked up: that the air up there will turn you into a raving visionary in a matter of hours, that after a few days you experience strange yearnings that are impossible to fulfill, that long-time residents become immortal and after death walk the woods as skeletons. What can you expect from hearsay? But one thing is certain among these conjectures: no one wants to give Thin Mountain a chance.

3. Only one way to Thin Mountain: absolute madness. By this I mean to put forth no clever insight. To be at eye level with the world clearly leads straight to nowhere; on the other hand, once your gaze slips off the horizontal, everything else goes with it. That is to say, no one can any longer vouch for your sanity. You have become . . . wayward. A grinning dwarf beckons you from the ledge of a tall building, gargoyles perched on cathedrals angle their snouts in a certain direction. And before you know it, you're lying around on Thin Mountain!

4. Not all that I have discovered about Thin Mountain is pleasant. Despite a great deal of picturesque scenery—floating strands of mist, narrow trees, fabulous fingerlike peaks—this region contains more than a few perils. One of them is a solitude fit only for fanatics of exile, their eyes always draining the distances. Another is a wind which seems to be composed of countless tiny voices, the chattering populus of an invisible universe. The half-lit days and the sorcery of its nights, moments in which nothing moves and others in which everything does. But what else would you expect from a place called Thin Mountain?

5. Once I heard the words "Thin Mountain" spoken in a crowd. Did I say that I saw who said it? I did not. It could have been anyone standing along the platform, waiting for the train to arrive. The same day someone threw himself under that train. He was cut in half, . . . but what a happy expression was plastered on the face of that corpse. "Thin Mountain!" I couldn't help crying out in front of everyone. But as I suspected, no one came forward to confront me.

6. Not once but a thousand times I wished to dwell forever on Thin Mountain, even at the price of my life or my sanity. No happiness except on those peaks!

7. One morning I awoke with great difficulty, and the pain, the noise was worse than ever. All day the pain, the noise. All day Thin Mountain.

8. Nothing secret, I now realize, concerning the existence of Thin Mountain. It seems everyone has  
(continued on page 36)

## SELECTIONS OF LOVECRAFT

By Thomas Ligotti

### THE FABULOUS ALIENATION OF THE OUTSIDER, BEING OF NO FIXED ABODE

The outsider lifts his shadow-wearied eyes and gazes about the moldy chamber where, to his knowledge, he has always lived. He has no recollection who he is or how he came to dwell so far removed from others of his kind who, he reasons, must exist, perhaps in that world high above which he vividly recalls, though he glimpsed it only once and long ago.

One night the outsider emerges from his underground domain and, guided solely by the glowing moon he has never really seen before, scrambles down a dark road, searching for friendly lights and, he hopes, friendly faces.

Eventually he comes upon a large, festively illuminated house. At first he peeks shyly through the windows at the parties inside; but soon his unbearable longing for the society of others, along with a barely evolved sense of etiquette, liberate him from all hesitations. Locating at last an unlocked door, he crashes the affair.

Inside the house—a structure of gorgeous, Georgian decor—everyone screams and flees at first sight of the outsider. After only a few seconds of recognition and companionship, this recluse by default is once again left to keep his own company. That is to say, he has been abandoned to the company of that untimely horror which initially set those gay and fine-looking people so indecorously on their heels. "What was it?" he asks himself, posing the question over and over with seemingly infinite repetition before finally collecting wits to squint a little to one side. "What was it?" he asks for the infinite time add one or two. "It was you," answers the mirror. "It was you!"

Now it is the outsider's turn to make his getaway from that hideous living corpse of unholy and unwholesome familiarity, that thing which had imperfectly decomposed in its subterranean unresting place. He seeks refuge in a chaotic dream-world where no one really notices the dead and no one even looks twice at the disgusting.

Eventually, however, he tires of this deranged, though unhostile, dimension of alienage. His heart more pulverized than simply broken, he decides to return to the sub-humous envelope from which he never should have strayed, there to reclaim his birthright of sloth, amnesia, and darkness. A period of time passes, indefinite for the outsider though decisive for the balance of the world's population.

For reasons unknown, the outsider once more drags his bulky frame earthwards. Arriving exhausted in the superterranean realm, he finds himself standing, badly, in neither darkness nor daylight, but some morbid transitional phase between the two. A senile sun throbs with deathly dimness, and every living thing on the face of the land has been choked by desolation and by an equivocal gloom which has perhaps already lasted millenia, if not longer. The outsider, a thing of the dead, has managed to outlive all those others whom, either from madness or mere loss of memory, he would willingly seek out to escape a personal void prior to astronomy.

This possibility is now, of course, as defunct as the planet itself. With all biology in tatters, the outsider will never again hear the consoling gasps of those who shunned him and in whose eyes and hearts he achieved a certain tangible identity, however loathsome. Without the others he simply cannot go on being himself—The Outsider—for there is



no longer anyone to be outside of! In no time at all he is overwhelmed by this atrocious paradox of fate.

In the midst of this revelation, a feeling begins to well up within the outsider, an incalculable sorrow deep inside. From the center of his being (which is now the center of all being that remains in existence) he summons a suicidal outburst of pain whose force shatters his rotting shape into hopelessly innumerable fragments. Catastrophically enough, this antic, designed to conclude universal genocide, gives off such energy that the distant sun is revived by a transfusion of warmth and light.

And each fragment of the outsider cast far across the earth now absorbs the warmth and catches the light, reflecting the future life and festivals of a resurrected race of beings: ones who will remain forever ignorant of their origins but for whom the sight of a surface of cold, unyielding glass will always hold profound and unexplainable terrors.

#### **THE BLASPHEMOUS ENLIGHTENMENT OF PROF. FRANCIS WAYLAND THURSTON, OF BOSTON, PROVIDENCE, AND THE HUMAN RACE**

In the late 1920s Prof. Thurston is putting a few final touches to a manuscript he intends no other person ever to lay eyes on, so that no one else will have to suffer unnecessarily in the way he has this past year or so. When it's all done with, he just sits in silence for a few moments in the library of his Boston home (summer sunlight wandering over the oak walls), and then he breaks down and weeps like a lost soul for the better part of the day, letting up later that evening.

Prof. Thurston is the nephew of George Gammell Angell, also a professor (at Brown U., Providence, RI), whose archaeological and anthropological unearthings led him, and after his death led his nephew, to some disturbing conclusions concerning the nature and fate of hu-

man life, with implications universal even in their least astounding aspects.

They discovered, positively, that throughout the world there exist savage cults which practice strange rites: degenerate Eskimos in the Arctic, degenerate Caucasians in New England seaport towns, and degenerate Indians and mulattoes in the Louisiana swamps not far from Tulane University, New Orleans. The two professors also discovered that the primary aim of these cults is to await and welcome the return of ante prehistoric monstrosities which will unseat the human race, overrun the earth, and generally have their way with our world.

These beings are as detestably inhuman as humanly imaginable, though no more so. From the common individual's viewpoint their nature is one of supreme evil and insanity, notwithstanding that the creatures themselves are indifferent to, if not totally unaware of, such mundane categories of value.

From the beginning of time they have held a certain attraction for persons interested in pursuing an existence of utter chaos and mayhem; that is, one of complete liberation at all conceivable levels.

After learning the designs these beings have on our planet, Prof. Thurston just assumes he will be murdered to keep him quiet on the subject, as his uncle and others have been. (And to think that at one point in his investigation he was planning to publish his findings in the journal of the American Archaeological Society!) All he can do now is wait.

For some reason, however, the followers of the Great Old Ones (as the extraterrestrial entities are referred to) never follow through, and Prof. Thurston appears to escape assassination, at least for an indefinite period of time. But this is little comfort, because knowing what he knows, Prof. Thurston is the most miserable man on earth. He grieves for his lost dream, and even the skies of spring and flow-ers of summer are a horror to his

eyes. It goes without saying that he now finds even the simplest daily task a joyless requisite for survival, and no more.

After months of boredom and a personal devastation far worse than any worldwide apocalypse could possibly be, he decides to return to his old job at the university. Not that he believes any longer in the hollow conclusions of his once beloved anthropology, but at least it would give him a way to occupy himself, to lose himself. Still, he continues to be profoundly despondent and his looks degenerate beyond polite comment.

"What's wrong, Professor Thurston?" a student asks him one day after class. The professor glances up at the girl. After only the briefest gaze into her eyes he can see that she really cares. "Amazing," he thinks. Of course there is no way he could tell her what is really wrong, but they do talk for a while and later take a walk across the campus on a clear autumn afternoon. They begin to see each other secretly off campus, and with graduation day behind them they finally get married, their ceremony solemn and discreet.

The couple honeymoons at a picturesque little town on the sea-coast of Massachusetts. To all appearances, several sublime days pass without one ripple of grief. One day, as he and his bride watch the sun descend into a perfectly unwrinkled ocean, Prof. Thurston almost manages to rationalize into nonexistence his dreadful knowledge. After all, he tells himself, there still exist precious human feeling and human beauty (e.g., the quaint little town) created by human hands. These things have been perennially threatened by disorder and oblivion. Anyway, all of it was bound to end somehow, at sometime. What difference did it make when the world was lost, or to whom?

But Prof. Thurston cannot sustain these consoling thoughts for long. All during their honeymoon he snaps pictures of his smiling

wife. He loves her, dearly, but her innocence is tearing him apart. How long can he conceal the terrible things he knows about himself, about her, and about the world? Even after he takes a picture, this wonderful girl just keeps smiling at him! How long can he live with this new pain?

The problem continues to obsess him (to the future detriment, he fears, of his marriage). Then, on the last night of the honeymoon . . . everything is resolved.

He awakens in the darkness from a strange dream he cannot recall. Outside the window of the bedroom it sounds as though the whole town is in an ambivalent uproar: hysterical voices blending festival and catastrophe. And there are weirdly colored lights quivering upon the bedroom wall. Prof. Thurston's wife is also awake, and she says to her husband: "The new masters have come in the night to their chosen city. Have you dreamed of them?" There passes a moment of silence. Then, at last, Prof. Thurston answers his wife with the long abandoned howl of a madman or a beast, for he too has dreamed the new dream and, without his conscious knowledge or consent, has embraced the new world.

And now nothing can hurt him as he has been so cruelly hurt in the past. Nothing will ever again cause him that pain he suffered so long, an intolerable anguish from which he could never have found release in any other way.

#### **THE PREMATURE DEATH OF H. P. LOVECRAFT, OLDEST MAN IN NEW ENGLAND**

H. P. Lovecraft, the last great writer of supernatural horror tales, has just died of stomach cancer at the age of 46 in a Providence, Rhode Island, hospital. He died alone and with no particular expression on his face. Upon the nightstand next to his bed are a few books and many handwritten pages in which Lovecraft recorded the sensations of his dying. (These latter are later lost,

to the dismay of scholars.)

Two nurses came into the room and are the first to discover that the gentleman in the private room has, not unexpectedly, passed away. They have already seen death many times in their nursing careers (they're both quite young), and neither is alarmed. They know nothing can be done for the dead man. One of them says: "Open a window, it's stuffy in here." "Sure is," replies the other. A crisp mid-March breeze freshens the room.

"Well, there's no more that can be done for him," comments the first nurse. Then she asks: "Do you remember if he had a wife or anybody who visited him?" The other nurse shakes her head negatively, then adds: "Are you kidding? He's not exactly the husband type. I mean, just take a look at that face, will you." The first nurse nods positively, makes a humorous remark about the deceased, and then both nurses leave the room smiling.

But apparently neither of them noticed the fantastic and frightening thing which occurred right before their eyes: H. P. Lovecraft, for only the shortest-lived moment, had faintly—just ever so, no more—smiled back at them.

#### MAIL-CALL (from page 36)

then there's 'The Lovecraftian Story' (The Burrowers Beneath)."

Let me conclude by saying that Crypt readers who have not read Leiber's Fantastic review owe it to themselves to locate a copy. It is one of the most concise and thoughtful appraisals of the differences between Lovecraft's fiction and modern Mythos fiction I've ever read, one that leaves open the question of whether we have the right to decide what is or is not Mythos fiction. Also, I find it interesting that Leiber claims to have been inculcated with "scientific skepticism toward all branches of the occult" by Lovecraft. Less than six years (continued on page 52)



# THE CONSOLATIONS OF HORROR

By Thomas Ligotti

## DARKNESS, WE WELCOME AND EMBRACE YOU

Horror, at least in its artistic presentations, can be a comfort. And, like any agent of enlightenment, it may even confer—if briefly—a sense of power, wisdom, and transcendence, especially if the conferee is a willing one with a true feeling for ancient mysteries and a true fear of the skulduggery which a willing heart usually senses in the unknown.

Clearly we (just the willing conferees remember) want to know the worst, both about ourselves and the world. The oldest, possibly the only theme is that of forbidden knowledge. And no forbidden knowledge ever consoled its possessor. (Which is probably why it's forbidden.) At best it is one of the more sardonic gifts bestowed upon the individual (for knowledge of the forbidden is first and foremost an individual ordeal). It is particularly forbidden because the mere possibility of such knowledge introduces a monstrous and perverse temptation to trade the quiet pleasures of mundane existence for the bright lights of alienage, doom, and, in some rare cases, eternal damnation.

So we not only wish to know the worst, but to experience it as well.

Hence that arena of artificial experience is supposedly the worst kind—the horror story—where gruesome conspiracies may be trumped up to our soul's satisfaction, where the deck is stacked with shivers, shocks, and dismembered hands for every player; and, most importantly, where one, at a safe distance, can come to grips (after a fashion) with death, pain, and loss in the, quote, real world, unquote.

But does it ever work the way we would like it to?

## A TEST CASE

I am watching Night of the Living Dead for the tenth time. I see the ranks of the deceased reanimated by a double-edged marvel of the modern age (atomic radiation, I think. Or is it some wonder chemical which found its way into the water supply? And does this detail even matter?). I see a group of average, almost documentary types holed up in a house, fighting off wave after wave of hungry ghouls. I see the group hopelessly losing their ground and succumb each one of them to the same disease as their sleepwalking attackers: A husband tries to eat his wife (or is it mother tries to eat child?), a daughter stabs her father with a gardener's trowel (or perhaps brother stabs sister with a bricklayer's trowel). In any case, they all die, and horribly. This is the important thing.

When the movie is over, I am bolstered by the sense of having rung the ear-shattering changes of harrowing horror; I've got another bad one under my belt (no less than for the tenth time) which will serve to bolster my nerves for whatever shocking days and nights are to come; I have, in a phrase, an expanded capacity for fear. I can really take it!

At the movies, that is.

The fearful truth is that all of the above brutalities can be taken only too well. And then, at some point, one starts to adopt unnatural strategies to ward off not the bogey but the sand man. Talking to the characters in a horror film, for instance: Hi, Mr. Decomposing Corpse lapping up a lump of sticky entrails. Hi! But even this tactic loses its charm after a while, especially if you're watching some "shocker" by yourself and lack an accomplice to share your latest stage

of jadedness and immunity to primitive fright. (At the movies, I mean. Otherwise you're the same old vulnerable self.)

So after a devoted horror fan is stuffed to the gills, thoroughly sated and consequently bored—what does he (the he's traditionally outnumber the she's here) do next? Haunt the emergency rooms of hospitals or the local morgues? Keep an eye out for the bloody mishaps on the freeway? Become a war correspondent? But now the issue has been blatantly shifted to a completely different plane—from movies to life—and clearly it doesn't belong there.

The one remedy for the horror addict's problem seems this: that if the old measure of medicine is just not strong enough—increase the dosage! (This pharmaceutical parallel is ancient but apt.) And thus we have the well-known and very crude basis for the horror film's history of ever-escalating scare tactics. Have you already seen such old standards as Werewolf of London too many times?—Sample one of its gore-enriched, yet infinitely inferior versions of the early 1980s. Of course the relief is only temporary; one's tolerance to the drug tends to increase. And looking down that long open road there appears to be no ultimate drugstore in sight, no final pharmacy where the horror hunger can be glutted on a sufficiently enormous dose, where the once insatiable addict may, at last, be heavied with all the demonic dope there is, collapse with sated obesity into the shadows, and quietly gasp: "enough."

The empty pit of boredom is ever renewing itself, while the horror films become less tantalizing to the marginally sadistic moviegoer.

And what is the common rationale for justifying what would otherwise be considered a just barely frustrated case of sadomasochism? Now we remember: to present us with horrors inside the theatre (or the books, let's not forget those) and thereby help us to assimilate the horrors on the outside, and also to

ready us for the Big One. This does sound reasonable, it sounds right and rational. But none of this has anything to do with these three R's. We are in the great forest of fear, where you can't fight real experiences of the worst with fake ones (no matter how well synchronized a symbolic correspondence they may have). When is the last time you heard of someone screaming himself awake from a nightmare, only to shrug it off with: "Yeah, but I've seen worse at the movies" (or read worse in the books; we'll get to them)? Nothing is worse than that which happens personally to a person. And though a bad dream may momentarily register quite high on the fright meter, it is, realistically speaking, one of the less enduring, smaller time terrors a person is up against. Try drawing solace from your half-dozen viewings of the Texas Chain-Saw Massacre when they're prepping you for brain surgery.

In all truth, frequenters of horror films are a jumpier, more casually hysterical class of person than most. (Statistics available on request.) We need the most reassurance that we can take it as well as anyone, and we tend to be the most complacent in thinking that seventeen straight nights of supernatural-psycho films is good for the nerves and will give us a special power which non-horror fanatics don't have. After all, this is supposed to be a major psychological selling point of the horror racket, the first among its consolations.

It is undoubtedly the first consolation, but it's also a false one.

#### INTERLUDE: SO LONG CONSOLATIONS OF MAYHEM

Perhaps it was a mistake selecting Night of the Living Dead to illustrate the consolations of horror. As a delegate from Horrorland this film is admirably incorruptible, oozing integrity. It hasn't sold out to the kindergarten moral codes of most "modern horror" movies and it has no particular message to de-

liver: its only news is nightmare. For pure brain-chomping, nerve-chewing, sight-cursing insanity, this is a very effective work, at least the first couple of times or so. It neither tries nor pretends to be anything beyond that. (And as we have already found, nothing exists beyond that anyway, except more and more of that.) But the big trouble is that sometimes we forget how much more can be done in horror movies (books too!) than that. We sometimes forget that supernatural stories—and this is a very good time to boot nonsupernatural ones right off the train: psycho, suspense, and the like—are capable of all the functions and feelings of real stories. For the supernatural can serve as a trusty vehicle for careening into realms where the Strange and the Familiar charge each other with the opposing poles of their passion.

The Haunting, for example. Besides being the greatest haunted house film ever made, it is also a great haunted human one. In it the ancient spirit of mortal tragedy passes easily through walls dividing the mysteries of the mundane world from those of the extra-mundane. And this supertragic spectre never comes to rest in either one of these worlds; it never lingers long enough to give us forbidden knowledge of the stars or ourselves, or anything else for that matter. To what extent may the "derangement of Hill House" (Dr. Markway's diagnosis) be blamed on the derangement of the people who were, are, and probably will be in it? And vice versa of course. Is there something wrong with that spiral staircase in the library or just with the clumsy persons who try to climb it? The only safe bet is that something is wrong, wherever the wrongness lies . . . and lies and lies. Our poor quartet of spook-chasers—Dr. Markway, Theo, Luke, and Eleanor—are not only helpless to untie themselves from entangling puppet strings; they can't even find the knots!

The ghosts at Hill House always remain unseen, except in their ef-

fects: savagely pummeling enormous oak doors, bending them like cardboard; writing assonant messages on walls ("Help Eleanor come home") with an unspecified substance ("Chalk," says Luke. "Or something like chalk," corrects Markway.); and in general giving the place a very bad feeling. We're not even sure who the ghosts are, or rather were. The pious and demented Hugh Crane, who built Hill House? His spinster daughter Abigail, who wasted away in Hill House? Her neglectful companion, who hung herself in Hill House? None of them emerges as a discrete, clearly definable haunter of the old mansion. Instead we have an undefined presence which seems a sort of melting pot of deranged forces from the past, an anti-America where the very poorest in spirit settle and stagnate and lose themselves in a massive and insane spectral body.

Easier to identify are the personal spectres of the living, at least for the viewer. But the characters in the film are too busy with outside things to look inside one another's houses, or even their own. Dr. Markway doesn't acknowledge Eleanor's spooks. (She loves him, hopelessly.) Eleanor can't see Theo's spooks (she's lesbian) and Theo avoids dwelling on her own. ("And what are you afraid of, Theo?" asks Eleanor. "Of knowing what I really want," she replies, somewhat uncandidly.) Best of all though is Luke, who doesn't think there ever are any spooks, until near the end of the film when this affable fun-seeker gains an excruciating sense of the alienation, perversity, and strangeness of the world around him. "It should be burned to the ground," he says of the high priced house he is to inherit, "and the earth sown with salt." This quasi-biblical quote indicates that more than a few doors have been kicked down in Luke's private passageways. He knows now! Poor Eleanor, of course, has been claimed by the house as one of its lonely, faceless citizens of eternity. It is her voice that gets to deliver

the reverberant last lines of the film: "Hill House has stood for eighty years and will probably stand for eighty more . . . but whatever walks there, walks alone." With these words the viewer glimpses a realm of unimaginable pain and horror, an unfathomable region of aching Gothic turmoil, a weird nevermoresville.

The experience is extremely disconsoling but nonetheless exhilarating.

But for a movie to convey such intense feeling for the supernatural is rare. (This one of course is a scrupulously faithful adaptation of Shirley Jackson's unarguably excellent novel.) The thing that is quite common, especially with fiction, is the phenomenon that produced the single-sentence paragraph above, in other words—the horror story's paradox of entertainment. The thumping heart of the question, though, is what really entertains us? In opposition, that is, to what we imagine entertains us. Entertainment, whatever we imagine its real source, is rightly regarded as its own justification, and this seems to be one of the unassailable consolations of horror.

But is it? (This won't take long.)

#### ANOTHER TEST CASE

We are reading—in a quiet, cozy room, it goes without saying—one of M. R. James' powerful ghost stories. It is "Count Magnus," in which a curious scholar gains knowledge he didn't even know was forbidden and suffers the resultant doom at the hands of the count and his betentacled companion. The story actually ends before we have a chance to witness its fabulous coup de grace, but we know that a sucked-off face is in store for our scholar. Meanwhile we sit on the sidelines (sipping a warm drink, probably) as the doomed academic meets a fate worse than any we'll ever know. At least we think it's worse, we hope it is . . . deep, deep in the subcellars of our minds we pray:

"Please don't let anything even like that happen to me! Not to me. Let it always be the other guy and I'll read about him, even tremble for him a little. Besides, I'm having so much fun, it can't be all that terrible. For him, that is. For me it would be unbearable. See how shaky and excitable I get just reading about it. So please let it always be the other guy."

But it can't always be the other guy, for in the long run we're all, each of us, the other guy.

Of course in the short run it's one of life's minor ecstasies—an undoubted entertainment—to read about a world in which the very worst doom takes place in a restricted area we would never ever wander into and befalls somebody else. And this is the run in which all stories are read, as well as written. (If something with eyes like two runny eggs were after your carcass, would you sit down and write a story about it?) It's another world, the short run, it's a world where horror really is a true consolation. But it's no compliment to Dr. James or to ourselves as readers to put too much stock in ghost stories as a consolation for our mortality, our vulnerability to real-life terrors. As consolations go, this happens to be a pretty low-grade one—demented complacency posing as beatitudes.

So our second consolation lives on borrowed time at best. And in the long-run where no mere tale can do you much good—is delusory.

(Perhaps the stories of H. P. Lovecraft offer a more threatening and admirable role to those of us devoted to doom. In Lovecraft's work doom is not restricted to eccentric characters in eccentric situations. It begins there but ultimately expands to violate the safety zone of the reader [and the non-reader for that matter, though the latter remains innocent of Lovecraft's forbidden knowledge]. M. R. James' are cautionary tales, lessons in how to stay out of spectral trouble and how nice and safe it feels to do so. But within the cosmic

boundaries of Lovecraft's universe, which many would call the universe itself, we are already in trouble, and feeling safe is out of the question for anyone with some brains and a chance access to the manuscripts of Albert Wilmarth, Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee, or Prof. Angell's nephew. These isolated narrators take us with them into their doom, which is the world's. [No one ever gives a hoot what happens to Lovecraft's characters as individuals.] If we knew what they know about the world and about our alarmingly tentative place in it, our brains would indeed reel with the revelation. And if we found out what Jermy found out about ourselves and our humble origins in a mere madness of biology, we would do as he did with a few gallons of gasoline and a merciful match. Of course Lovecraft insists on telling us things it does no good to know: things that can't help us or protect us or even prepare us for the awful and inevitable apocalypse to come. The only comfort is to accept it, live in it, and sigh yourself into the balm of living oblivion. If you can only maintain this constant sense of doom, you may be spared the pain of foolish hopes and their impending demolishment.

But we can't maintain it; only a saint of doom could. Hope leaks into our lives by way of spreading cracks we always meant to repair but never did. Oddly enough, when the cracks yawn their widest, and the promised deluge comes at last, it is not hope at all that finally breaks through and drowns us.)

#### **INTERLUDE: SEE YOU LATER, CONSOLATIONS OF DOOM**

So when a fictional state of absolute doom no longer offers us possibilities of comfort—what's left? Well, another stock role casts one not as the victim of a horror story but as the villain in it. That is, we get to be the monster for a change. To a certain extent this is supposed to happen when we walk onto those resounding floor-

boards behind the Gothic footlights. It's traditional to identify with and feel sorry for the vampire or the werewolf in their ultimate moment of weakness, a time when they're most human. Sometimes, though, it seems as if there's much fun to be had playing a vampire or werewolf at the height of their monstrous, people-maiming power. To play them in our hearts, I mean. After all, it would be kind of great to wake up at dusk every day and cruise around in the shadows and fly on batwings through the night, stare strangers in the eye and have them under your power. Not bad for someone who's supposed to be dead. Or rather, for someone who can't die and whose soul is not his own; for someone who—no matter how seemingly suave—is doomed to ride eternity with a single and highly embarrassing obsession, the most debased junkie immortalized.

But maybe you could make it as a werewolf. For most of a given month you're just like anybody else. Then for a few days you can take a vacation from your puny human self and spill the blood of puny human others. And once you return to your original clothes size, no one is any the wiser . . . until next month rolls around and you've got to do the whole thing again, month after month, over and over. Still, the werewolf's lifestyle might not be so bad, as long as you don't get caught ripping out someone's throat. Of course, there might be some guilt involved and, yes, bad dreams.

Vampirism and lycanthropy do have their drawbacks, anyone would admit that. But there would also be some memorable moments too, moments humans rarely, if ever, have: feeling your primal self at one with the inhuman forces around you, fearless in the face of night and nature and solitude and all those things from which mere people have much to fear. There you are under the moon—a raging storm in human form. And you'll always be like that, forever if you're careful. Being a human being is a



dead end anyway. It would seem that supernatural sociopaths have more possibilities open to them. So wouldn't it be great to be one? What I mean, of course, is: is it a consolation of horror fiction to let us be one for a little while? Yes, it really is; the attractions of this life are sometimes irresistible. But are we missing some point if we only see the glamour and ignore the drudgery in the existence of these free spirited nyctophiles? Well, are we?

### THE LAST TEST

Test cancelled. The consolation is patently a trick one, done with invisible writing, mirrors, and camera magic.

### SUBSTITUTE CONSOLATION: "THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER, OR DOOM REVISITED"

Did you ever wonder how a Gothic story like Poe's masterpiece can be so great without enlisting the reader's care for its characters' doom? Plenty of horrible events and concepts are woven together; the narrator and his friend Roderick experience a fair amount of FEAR. But unlike a horror story whose effect depends on reader sympathy with its fictional victims, this one doesn't want us to get involved with the characters in that way. Our fear does not derive from theirs. Though Roderick, his sister, and the visiting narrator are fascinating companions, they do not burden us with their individual catastrophes. Are we sad for Roderick's and his sister's terrible fate? No. Are we happy the narrator makes a safe flight from the sinking house? Not particularly. Then why get upset about this calamity which takes place in the backwoods, miles from the nearest town and everyday human concerns?

In this story individuals are not the issue. Everywhere in Poe's literary universe (Lovecraft's too) the individual is horribly and comfortably irrelevant. During the

reading of "The Fall of the House of Usher" we don't look over any particular character's shoulder but have our attention distributed god-wise into every corner of a foul factory which manufactures only one product: total and inescapable doom. Whether a given proper noun escapes or is caught on a given occasion is beside the point. This is a world created with built-in obsolescence, and to appreciate fully this downrunning cosmos one must take the perspective of its creator, which is all perspectives without getting sidetracked into a single one. Therefore we as readers are the House of Usher (both family and structure), we are the fungi clustering across its walls and the violent storm over its ancient head; we sink with the Ushers and get away with the narrator. In brief, we play all the roles. And the consolation in this is that we are supremely removed from the mad-deningly tragic viewpoint of the human.

Of course, when the story is over we must fall from our god's perch and sink back into humanness, which is perhaps what the Ushers and their house are doing. This is always a problem for would-be gods! We can't maintain for very long a godlike point of view. Wouldn't it be great if we could; if life could be lived outside the agony of the individual? But we are always doomed and redoomed to become involved with our own lives, which is the only life there is, and godlikeness has nothing at all to do with it.

But still, wouldn't it be great . . .

### DARKNESS, YOU'VE DONE A LOT FOR US

At this point it may seem that the consolations of horror are not what we thought they were, that all this time we've been keeping company with illusions. Well, we have. And we'll continue to do so, continue to seek the appalling scene which short-circuits our brain, con-

tinue to sit in our numb coziness with a book of terror on our laps like a cataleptic predator, and continue to draw smug solace, if only for the space of a story, from a world made snug and simple by absolute hopelessness and doom. These consolations are still effective, even if they don't work as well as we would prefer them to. But they are only effective, like most things of value in art or life, as illusions. And there's no point attributing to them powers of therapy or salvation they don't and can't have. There are enough disappointments in the world without adding that one.

Perhaps, though, our illusion of consolation could be enhanced by acquiring a better sense of what we are being consoled by. What, in fact, is a horror story? And what does it do? First the latter.

The horror story does the work of a certain kind of dream we all know. Sometimes it does this so well that even the most irrational and unlikely subject matter can infect the reader with a sense of realism beyond the realistic, a trick usually not seen outside the vaudeville of sleep. When is the last time you failed to be fooled by a nightmare, didn't suspend disbelief because its incidents weren't sufficiently true-to-life? The horror story is only true to dreams, especially those which involve us in mysterious ordeals, the passing of secrets, the passages of forbidden knowledge, and, in more ways than one, the spilling of guts.

What distinguishes horror from other kinds of stories is the exclusive devotion of their practitioners, their true practitioners, to self-consciously imagining and isolating the most demonic aspects and episodes of human existence, undiminished by any consolation whatever. For here no consolation on earth is sufficient to the horrors it will struggle in vain to make bearable.

Are horror stories truer than other stories? They may be, but not necessarily. They are limited

to depicting conditions of extraordinary suffering, and while this is not the only game in town, such depictions can be as close to truth as any others. Nevertheless, what simple fictional horror—no matter how grossly magnified—can ever hold a candle to the complex mesh of misery and disenchantment which is merely the human routine? Of course the fundamental horror of existence is not always apparent to us, its constantly menaced but unwary existers. But in true horror stories we can see it even in the dark. All eternal hopes, optimistic outs, and ultimate redemptions are cleared away, and for a little while we can pretend to stare the very worst right in its rotting face.

Why, though? Why?

Just to do it, that's all. Just to see how much unmitigated weirdness, sorrow, desolation, and cosmic anxiety the human heart can take and still have enough heart left over to translate these agonies into artistic forms: James' stained-glass monstrosities, Lovecraft's narrow-passaged blasphemies, Poe's symphonic paranoia. As in any satisfying relationship, the creator of horror and its consumer approach oneness with each other. In other words, you get the horrors you deserve, those you can understand. For contrary to conventional wisdom, you cannot be frightened by what you don't understand.

This, then, is the ultimate, that is only, consolation: simply that someone shares some of your own feelings and has made of these a work of art which you have the insight, sensitivity, and—like or not—peculiar set of experiences to appreciate. Amazing thing to say, the consolation of horror in art is that it actually intensifies our panic, loudens it on the sounding-board of our horror-hollowed hearts, turns terror up full blast, all the while reaching for that perfect and deafening amplitude at which we may dance to the bizarre music of our own misery.

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# R'lyeh Review

Steve Behrends with Donald Sidney-Fryer and Rah Hoffman, eds. Strange Shadows: The Uncollected Fiction and Essays of Clark Ashton Smith. Greenwood Press (88 Post Road, Westport, CT 06881), 1989, 281 pp. \$39.95.

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

Any review of the collected marginalia of Clark Ashton Smith that appears in a magazine devoted to the work of H. P. Lovecraft must be written with certain audience factors in mind: first, that there are many diehard Lovecraftians who can't abide Smith's work, or who find it greatly inferior to Lovecraft's; and second, that many Lovecraftians who admire Smith's fiction have little interest in the arcana of Smith scholarship. If you fall into either of these groups, then Strange Shadows is not a book for you.

If, however, you are the type of reader who approaches Smith's work with the same spirit of scholarly curiosity that motivated Lovecraftians to purchase H. P. Lovecraft: A Commonplace Book or the five volumes of Lovecraft's Selected Letters, and in particular if you are someone who owns a copy of The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith or who bought "The Unexpurgated Clark Ashton Smith" series from Necronomicon Press, then Strange Shadows is an indispensable addition to your library. Quite simply, it is the best edited and organized book of Smith's writing published yet. It is expensively priced (although no more—and in some cases much less—so than any other Greenwood Press book), but the cost reflects both Greenwood Press' quality production values and the considerable research that has gone into the collation and annotation of the text.

Editor Steve Behrends bills the book as a collection of Smith's "extant previously unpublished prose" and, with the exception of his juve-

nilia, "the final addition to this major fantasiste's body of fiction." Actually, some of these selections were published in obscure sources during Smith's lifetime, as well as in issues 26 and 27 of Crypt of Cthulhu (which carried a handful of the stories and synopses and an early incarnation of "The Lost Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith," Behrends' valuable appendix on Smith's lost fiction), but this is the first time they have been collected and arranged in chronological order (where Smith's dating would allow) for easy access. Excluding the notes and the three appendices (Behrends' article, the first draft of the CAS-Don Carter collaboration, "The Nemesis of the Unfinished," and several pages of addenda for The Black Book), the book's contents are divided into four major sections: "Fantastic Fiction," "Non-Fantastic Fiction," "Prose Poems and Plays" and "Miscellaneous Non-Fiction and Prose." The fantastic fiction section comprises roughly two-thirds of Strange Shadows, and is itself subdivided into another seven sections. Since the contents are not meant to cohere or represent anything more than a collection of fugitive pieces that appeared at different points in Smith's career, the only realistic way to give an idea of what the book offers is to discuss each section's merits.

Completed Stories (5). These five stories, written between 1931 and 1961, show off Smith's artistic palette in its every hue. "A Good Embalmer" is a cartoonish shocker that even Smith admitted was "uncharacteristic" for him. "Nemesis of the Unfinished" is one of his rare collaborations. In the best entry, "Double Cosmos," Smith explores the same theme he used in "The Chain of Aforgomon," "Xee-thra" and many other stories: the revelation that our world is a fallen, or subordinate, manifestation of a more exotic dimension. "Strange Shadows" (ultimately retitled "I Am

Your Shadow") is at one and the same time fascinating and frustrating. Smith hoped to sell it to Unknown, a magazine that consciously avoided publishing the kind of fantasy that appeared in Weird Tales and, indeed, the story is full of the type of dry wit that Unknown editor John W. Campbell enjoyed. However, because the tale is not written in Smith's usual florid style, it exposes a weakness one tends to overlook in his more effusive fantasies: lack of plot. Smith must have realized this, for he revised the tale twice, adding a little bit more to the story line each time. With each successive revision, though, the story gradually became a Weird Tales-type story. Smith completed "The Dart of Rasasfa" only months before he died and long after his most creative years were past. It would be nice to say his career ended with a bang, but the final evidence doesn't bear this out. Granted, Smith wrote the story to accompany cover art already commissioned for Fantastic, and so had to incorporate specific images he might never have used were the story completely his own creation. Nevertheless, "Dart" is a silly space opera from the Wonder Stories school, a type of fiction that was long out of vogue by 1962.

Variant Versions of Published Stories (3). "In the Book of Vergama" is a three-paragraph prelude lopped from "The Last Hieroglyph." The version of "The Coming of the White Worm" published here is slightly longer than the one that appeared in Stirring Science Stories in 1941. Smith altered both of these stories on his own and the changes he made do not greatly affect the works as they were published. However, he also altered "The Beast of Averogne" after the version published here was rejected by Weird Tales, and the damage is significant. Smith had planned to tell the story from three different points of view. By cutting 1400 words and limiting the narrative to the particular point of view he settled on, he robbed the story of its

mystery and much of its human interest.

Fragmentary Stories with Accompanying Synopses (5) and Fragmentary Stories (14). Several of these fragments are developed just enough to leave the reader wondering how they might have turned out. Of the first group, "The Master of Destruction" (1931) is interesting for opening with a scene similar to the climax of Lovecraft's "The Shadow out of Time." The two most promising entries, though, are "Asharia," with its subtheme of an eternal interplanetary war, and "The Music of Death," a moody descent into the Gothic mode. "The Infernal Star" is the most interesting item of the second group, mostly for its bulk—10,000 words (hardly a fragment!)—and for the fact that Smith appeared to be using it as a stockpot for names and places from the Lovecraft Mythos and his own story cycles. Curiously, out of all the plotted but uncompleted stories in these two sections, all but two or three are earthbound adventures or space operas, leaving one to wonder if Smith didn't compose his more exotic fantasies more spontaneously.

Synopses (97). Smith's story ideas run from single sentences to several pages in length. He wrote down the majority of those included here between 1929 and 1932, and the ones he ultimately developed into stories are worth comparing to the final product. The brief entry for "The Supernumerary Corpse," for example—"A man dies, and leaves two corpses. In two different places"—gives no indication of how Smith would turn this plot germ into a Poe-esque horror story focused on the tortured psyche of a murderer who cannot account for his victim's two corpses. Before writing his tale of Averogne, "The Disinterment of Venus," it appears that Smith altered the synopsis so that the buried statue of the title would be found by monks excavating monastery ground, rather than peasants tilling a turnip field—a crucial change that made the story's sexual undercurrent seem much

more subversive. "The Nameless Offspring" is considered by many to be one of Smith's more gruesome stories, but its synopsis shows the climax of the published story to be milder than Smith had originally planned it. One of Smith's more interesting transformations can be traced through the notes that ultimately led to his writing "The Light from Beyond." As the story idea progresses from the synopsis "The Burial Place of the Unknown" to "The Cairn," we see Smith tinkering with two of his favorite themes—the discovery of a gateway to another world, and the sensory derangement experienced by someone transplanted from our world to a more exotic environment. However, sometime between writing the synopsis "The Cairn (New Ending)" and the published story, Smith decided not to have his artist narrator come back insane, but to have him return unable to paint anymore. By doing so, he transformed a routine pulp fantasy into what might be interpreted as a commentary on the artist's need to keep his imagination at arm's length.

**Fantastic Titles and Fantastic Names.** These are hundreds of proper names and story titles Smith jotted down between 1929 and 1930. Most were never used, suggesting that Smith was more attracted to their poetic sound than intent on turning them into fiction.

**Non-Fantastic Fiction (8).** This section is interesting mostly because the writing is surprisingly bad. "The Parrot" is a good attempt at a murder mystery that dissipates too early what should have been a surprise ending. The remaining pieces are trite tearjerkers or love stories that Smith probably wrote with specific pulp markets in mind—proof that he could hack with the best of them.

**Prose Poems and Plays (12).** All of the prose poems included here have been collected into Necronomicon Press' *Nostalgia of the Unknown*. The showpiece is "The Dead Will Cuckhold You," a praiseworthy verse drama that reads a

little like Byron by way of Swinburne.

**Miscellaneous and Non-Fiction Prose (6).** There is one gem amongst these brief notes and introductions: "Cigarette Characterization," in which Smith uses Smithian hyperbole to describe the pleasures of a lit cigarette. Obviously, he was not above poking fun at himself.

If I've given the impression that much of the material in *Strange Shadows* is lacking in intrinsic merit, it is not without cause. This is not the sort of book one turns to for an evening of entertainment or even an introduction to Smith's writing. It is a reference book, and it will be of greatest interest to those doing Smith research or those already familiar with his fiction. A good deal of the book's value lies in Steve Behrends' detailed notes and annotations, which not only reveal otherwise unknown information about Smith's creative and personal life, but also forge connections between works that Smith aficionados may have overlooked. My only caveat—that some of the more obvious items (the synopses for "Ubbo-Sathla," "The Double Shadow" and other ideas which eventually became published) are not annotated—is small when measured against the full scholarly achievement of *Strange Shadows*. Years from now, this will still be an invaluable source book for Smith studies.

#### **MAIL-CALL** (from page 41)

after Lovecraft died, Leiber was to write his brilliant novel *Conjure Wife* (which probably owes a small but significant debt to Lovecraft's "Dreams in the Witch House"), in which a too rigid skepticism almost results in the death of Norman and Tansy Saylor from "occult" forces. Would that Lovecraft had lived long enough to see this tale published! I think he would have been astounded by the originality of Leiber's approach.

--Stefan R. Dziemianowicz

# MAIL-CALL OF CTHULHU

Crypt #30 and #48 included some favorable comments about the psychedelic folk-rock albums "H. P. Lovecraft" (1967) and "H. P. Lovecraft II" (1968), issued by the Philips label.

These two albums have been re-issued by a British label, Edsel Records, a division of Demon Records Ltd., as a double album: "H. P. Lovecraft—At The Mountains Of Madness," DED256, reasonably priced for an import at about \$16.

--Steve Benner, Roslyn, PA

Do women read horror fiction and critical commentary on the genre? Do women write the stuff? How much of it do they write, and how many of them read it? And—is what they write any good?

These questions have been debated in the letters column of Crypt of Cthulhu for a while now. Moved to comment, the wonder is that I've been able to keep still for so long.

Jessica Salmonson (Crypt #51) charges that women are underrepresented in Crypt. Editor Robert Price maintains that "the representation of women and men both among readers and writers of Crypt reflects the proportionate interest of both sexes rather than magnifying the one at the expense of the other."

Proportionate representation, however, is not what Salmonson has in mind: "The hoary excuse 'I wasn't sent anything by women' is not sufficient," she writes. Charging that "subconsciously or otherwise, an editor has to try mighty hard to feature so few women," Salmonson says that it is incumbent upon editors to seek out women writers in this field.

But if "Story by Woman" is specifically sought, instead of "Best Story Available," good writers will be neglected, readers will be denied the best fiction, and women of integrity will have to wonder if their work appeared because of its intrinsic merit or because some quota was being met.

(I'm not saying that "Best Story" is never "Story by Woman." It often is. But pick by literary standards, not gender quotas.)

The fungi hit the fan, though, with Pierre Comtois' pair of letters (Crypt #55 and #63). Comtois cites the greater number of men than women reading and writing horror fiction. This is, perhaps, verifiable statistical stuff (although Darrell Schweitzer marshalls some stats about Night Cry's readership in refutation). Comtois continues:

Far from being anti women in its choice of writers, Crypt really does reflect the vast gap between the number of male to female readers in HPL-related fare. Personally I've never met a single female who took the slightest interest in the genre . . . [The] configuration of the SF/Fantasy sections of any book store with their preponderance of female-written fantasy novels and Star Trek adventures, lead me to conclude that most female readers' interests lie in a direction completely opposed to the interests of HPL enthusiasts. . . The few female writers in the field are the exception, but when one considers they make up a tiny fraction of the readers, and thus of those inspired to write . . .

And he goes on (and on), never deciding if he is discussing female writers or female readers. What is the point here: that because some women writers have turned out fantasy and Star Trek novels, this is what most women buy and read? Vastly more people read than write, after all, and many read books written by members of the opposite sex.

Comtois claims that he is "pointing out obvious reading trends in the general population," hut the fantasy section of some bookstore, and his own lack of acquaintance with any woman interested in the

horror genre, scarcely constitute a representative sample of the "general population" or of the reading public.

Far from dealing with general tendencies, Comtois is very specific indeed. He selects certain genres, pronounces most of the authors female and assumes a female readership (not demonstrated or supported), then concludes . . . uh, he concludes . . . well, something, surely. That this is what women read instead of horror fiction, perhaps? Again—not demonstrated, not supported.

Ros Calverley (*Crypt* 61) notes that Comtois cites women writers in genres other than horror. Comtois insists that he knows the difference between horror and *Sword and Sorcery*. Maybe so, but this is not demonstrated in his pair of letters. Comtois claims that "the females on the whole fail in horror writing when compared with the males." He goes on immediately to cite C. L. Moore, the *Women of Wonder* anthology, and to refer to the "derivative and dull material on the SF book-stalls," all of which is quite apart from the point.

Both Calverley and Schweitzer (*Crypt* 61) list a number of notable women horror writers. Comtois maintains that he is "quite familiar with many of the writers listed . . . having read them many years ago; I wasn't impressed with them then, and I certainly won't waste time with them now."

This is an extraordinarily frank admission of inflexibility. I shall certainly do Comtois the courtesy of accepting at face value the rigid and narrow-minded persona he chooses to present, but I am puzzled about the attitude that underlies such an assertion. Is Comtois proud that his tastes and critical perceptions have developed not at all in these "many years"? It looks as if Schweitzer nailed it when he said that Comtois dismisses all women writers of horror because he does not like any of them.

No possible benefit can accrue from prejudging a work of literature

based upon the author's sex. However, this is not to say that sex is irrelevant. To maintain, as Tani Jantsang does (*Crypt* 64), that it is a manifestation of "insecurities about [one's] OWN sexuality" [emphasis Jantsang's] to even notice authorial gender is absurd and indefensible.

Susan Michaud states (*Crypt* 61): "There are as many differences between men's and women's writings as there are between men and women. These differences have to do with nature as well as nurture, and they are what essentially makes life interesting."

There are indeed differences. The ability to write well is not one of them.

Horror remains a field of limited appeal. Among the general reading public, few read horror fiction; fewer still read the attendant body of criticism. Of this small number, fewer females than males participate. And so what? Surely the wider appeal to one sex of a literary genre is a morally neutral, and not a bad thing. Are those women who do write in this genre as skillful as the men who do so? Yes, of course.

Jessica Salmonson's call for a special place to be made for women in horror could easily lead to the development of a nice genteel ghetto for women writers, singled out and judged by a separate set of standards—assessed as "Woman Horror Writer" instead of simply "Horror Writer," or better yet, as "Writer."

Comtois is welcome to dislike the work of any damned writer he pleases, but his preferences are clearly divided on gender lines, and fly in the face of popular and critical consensus. He cannot be so disingenuous as to expect this to go unremarked.

Oh, yeah—"popular and critical consensus," airily dismissed by so many contributors to this debate. It's silly to deny affinities with any group. Why insist so strenuously that one's opinion is nonrepresentative?—thus rendering it pretty valueless in a discussion of trends and tendencies.



"My, what a firestorm in a teacup I started," Comtois writes blandly in Crypt 63, as if surprised by the controversy that followed his provocative statements. Surely he expected this "war of words" to erupt. I hope he's enjoying and possibly even reflecting upon it, as I am.

--Marie Lazzari, Northville, MI

I find that a good argument has somewhat of a rejuvenative effect on my prose and must, therefore, henceforth communicate not in the accents of him your Mr. Lovecraft refers to as "the Old Pretender," but rather at the dictates of the daemon Clarity.

Those who question my use of the word "bearded" as though I had confused Mr. Arnold's muttonchop whiskers for the fuller article of facial growth are admonished to open their copies of the 1971 OED, that available to my transcriber, and peruse the definitions there supplied for "beard" and "bearded." They may find of particular interest that definition of "bearded" which implies a setting "at defiance, a thwarting, an affront." In a vain attempt of subtlety I referred not only to the "effect" of Mr. Arnold's rapidly moving, muttonchopped jaws near the outward surface of my ear, but the "intent," partly suggested by tone and rhythm, of the words thus spoken.

I am reminded that Dagon is a god of the Philistines, whom Mr. Arnold is forever deriding. Surely, Mr. Lovecraft would not have his followers mistake the behavior of the worshippers for study of the god.

--Henry James

Crypt seems of two minds: is Lumley a wanker or isn't he? Well, I used to quite a lot . . . but I was just a boy then and soon discovered women. I'm glad Dziemianowicz (Jesus, talk about Cthulhu being hard to pronounce!) finally found something of mine that he likes. The Necroscope books, I mean; or more specifically Wamphyri! Hopefully he'll like Necroscope III:

The Source, IV: Deadspeak, and V: Deadspawn just as much. But if not . . . well, you can't please everyone all the time. The last two will be the end of it. (And, incidentally, the first two in the series have recently been reprinted in UK.)

But it seems I should say a word or two about the Hero books (Hero of Dreams, Ship of Dreams, Mad Moon, etc.). And about Burrowers. First let me say that Dzie—can I call him Dizzy?—that Dizzy's review of Burrowers got the closest to the real me and my intentions than any other before it. It was like he read my mind. I applaud it because I know he read this one. But let me also say of his answer to Paul Ganley's letter that he's wrong.

The trouble with a lot of Lovecraft "experts" is that they aren't; usually they only remember it the way they want to, not the way it is. Or they've read the stuff so often that it just doesn't make any impression any more. I'm not saying Dizzy is deliberately misleading, just that his memory is faulty.

I have to hand it to the most recent Arkham Dunwich Horror & Co., p. 139, a third of the way down the page:

"They worshipped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. Those Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult which had never died. This was that cult, and the prisoners said it had always existed and always would exist, hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world until the time when the great priest Cthulhu, from his dark house in the mighty city of R'lyeh under the waters, should rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway. Some day he would call, when the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him."

Quite obviously, Wilcox and

others of that ilk, and the cultists, have heard his call. He has spoken to them in dreams. I mean, the story is called "The Call of Cthulhu," after all!

On the next page we learn that there are arts which can revive the Great Old Ones. So now we know why Cthulhu bothers to chat telepathically with mere people: to pass on the spells which can raise him up from R'lyeh. But . . . if I haven't made the point clearly enough, HPL himself makes it at bottom of page 140:

" . . . some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies. The spells that preserved Them intact likewise prevented Them from making an initial move, and They could only lie awake in the dark and think whilst uncounted millions of years rolled by. They knew all that was occurring in the universe, for Their mode of speech was transmitted thought. Even now They talked in Their tombs. When, after infinities of chaos, the first

men came, the Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by moulding their dreams; for only thus could their language reach the fleshly minds of mammals . . ."

And so on. Page 141 is full of it, too.

So you see, you're wrong, Dizzy. You asked a question: "Do the Old Ones contact human beings or send dreams to them in "The Call of Cthulhu"? Yes. But don't take my word for it, read the story. It's a reviewer's duty after all. Meanwhile, I'll condense it for you:

Cthulhu sent dreams to reinforce the spells of his secret priests and warn them of his imminence. The sensitives overheard his dream sendings and some cracked up (why, some were so badly affected they couldn't even remember the %\*?@\$\$ story!).

Now, there are those who'll argue black is white. I once saw two guys in a Sgt.'s Mess decide a heated argument by tossing a coin . . . and then argue that they'd both

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called heads! But there is no argument here. Whether my story was a good or bad one and liked or loathed isn't the point; what is the point is that Canley is right, and no amount of waffle can disprove it. Lovecraft wrote what he wrote, and even in the "revised" or "corrected" version it's still writ. Be warned, Dizzy: even folks who try to re-write HPL come on hard times, but people who would unwrite him get gobbled up by nameless things . . .

To write a definite finis on all this, on page 147 there's the narrator totting up all the damnable information:

"What of all this--and of those hints of old Castro about the sunken, star-born Old Ones and their coming reign; their faithful cult and their mastery of dreams?" And those are Lovecraft's italics this time . . .

About the Dreamlands books.

Just like I loved everything Lovecraftian, I loved his dreamlands. Marvellous, fantastic creation. And others, who used the setting tried (I think) to stick to the Lovecraft formula. Myers and Carter, for example. They tried, anyway. But I have trouble relating to people who faint at the hint of a bad smell. A meep or glibber doesn't cut it with me. (I love meeps and glibbers, don't get me wrong, but I go looking for what made them!) That's the main difference between my stories in that setting and HPL's. My guys fight back. Also, they like to have a laugh along the way.

I give you an example from Ife:

I did a little service in Malta. There are Crusader remains (and how!) in Malta. There are wonderful buildings, there's history, there are lessons to be learned, a lot to take in. But my mind doesn't run to learning all the time. HPL has Randolph Carter sitting in a tavern listening to the mournful songs of salty old sea-dogs. Me? I was down Straight Street (called "The Gut" by every sailor who ever was) listening to the Beatles, drinking Chisk, Hop Leaf and Blue Label

and ogling the girlies!

I was in places HPL wouldn't ever go. Now the dreamlands are made from the dreams of men, and it takes all types. So the background is the same but the dream is different! My guys hang out in the Craven Lobster or Buxom Barba's Quayside Quareess. And the things they get up to and the quests they go on can't be too farfetched! Hell, Randolph Carter passed from the moon to the dreamlands in a leap of cats!

Point made, I hope.

Headline Books UK will be doing the series in mass paperback starting in August. The jackets are quite beautiful.

Crypt is good but expensive. If I didn't get complimentary copies I'd go broke. But there again I'd get a lot more paying writing done, too . . .

--Brian Lumley  
Devon, England

PS: Where was the Darrell Schweitzer letter? Maybe like me and Cthulhu he wonders if he's getting through, if there's anyone out there hearing his call?

PPS: And maybe like me and Cthulhu he doesn't really give a twopenny toss anyway.

PPSS: Someone recently remarked in Crypt on pearls before swine and a kingdom of literary heaven. On the same subject, a lot of camels will leap nimbly through the eye of the needle before this turkey!

Don Burleson's admirably restrained and reasoned letter in Crypt #64 is an absolute model of how to respond to one's critics. I only wish all other combatants in literary controversies could manage to be so decent. Don sticks to the issues, which is what all of us should do. A literary argument, no matter how heated, must never become personal. I was afraid there for a while that I'd been riding him a bit hard. If this becomes genuinely acrimonious, I'll drop the whole subject.

That being so, I can't say he's

convinced me. He is of course right that I know very little about Structuralism and related doctrines, and I have not read all those books he lists. But he is like a devout astrologer insisting that one can't really judge astrology without studying vast mounds of astrological lore for many years.

Most of us don't do that. The reason is that we're not convinced that astrology has any validity at all. It doesn't produce results. Scientific medicine, on the other hand, does. It too requires years of study, but one might be motivated to spend all those years because the results—the validity of the discipline—are plain for all to see.

The problem with Structuralism is that it doesn't have anything to show. I can't think of a single valid insight to come out of Don's various analyses, or, for that matter, various speeches and articles by Samuel Delany. I have never come across anything which makes me say, "Wow! I want to learn to do that."

What I have seen is a lot of, yes, gibberish, and frequently ludicrous attempts to ignore the obvious and arrive at the most absurd conclusions. I also see what I can only take as supreme arrogance: advocates of one school of criticism declaring all others evermore obsolete, and then demanding that everyone learn an arcane jargon which, indeed, no other school of criticism requires.

My only reply to that is that I don't need a glossary to read Edmund Wilson. I don't regard this as a shortcoming on Wilson's part.

One shrewd critic I know suggested that maybe there really is some knowledge to be gained from Structuralism, but that Burleson and Delany are doing it wrong.

Maybe so. Unless we get the first intelligible Structuralist, this is all going to be lost, either laughed down or yawned down, whichever comes first. Some college English teachers I know tell me that in the conventional academic world, Struc-

turalism is almost dead. It is a fad whose time has passed. Wouldn't it be exquisitely ironic if our little province harbored the last living structuralist, a kind of literary passenger pigeon? But it would also be ironic—and a tragic waste of a talented writer's time—if once Don has finished his Structuralist book on HPL, the whole silly fad is so obsolete that no one will publish it.

The Delany speech I was referring to, by the way, is being serialized in The New York Review of Science Fiction. It still doesn't make any sense. Once in a while there are glimmerings, as if it'll all come into focus, but then it fades out again.

Another loss, because Delany used to be a fine critic and essayist.

I will confess my own personal bias in all this, the fiction-writer's inherent suspicion of critical theory. Structuralism is an extreme example, but critical theory as a rule is only of interest to other theorists. It has nothing to do with literature, either as it is created (especially as it is created!) or as it is enjoyed.

On the subject of further silliness, Will Murray is entirely missing the point in his article on the film of "The Whisperer in Darkness." He would have us believe this is a real movie. No, it is a strictly amateur film, shot with a home movie camera. His article is the equivalent of professional sports criticism applied to the Special Olympics.

I saw The Whisperer in Darkness about the time it was made. I may have even seen the premiere, in Ben Indick's living room, at a gathering of fans back around 1975 or so. As I recall, it was shown on a home-movie projector. (VCRs hadn't been invented yet. I am surprised, by the way, that someone actually took the trouble to transfer this thing to videotape.) One of the perpetrators—I think it was David C. Smith, that same Smith who has written some Red Sonia novels with Richard Tierney—was present, and

explaining how this and that aspect of the film were done.

I remember that the Old Ones looked like someone in a cardboard box waving cardboard wings. I remember too that the only sound was the tape-recording J. Vernon Shea makes when interviewing the bushes.

But I also remember that the film was actually well received by its audience. It seemed, in its own way, more faithful to the spirit of Lovecraft than any of the professional films. Everyone there understood that this was to be regarded the same way you would a high school play, or a film which a handful of fans made with a home-movie camera in their back yard—which is largely what it was.

Of course nobody in it went on to have real screen careers, any more than I did after playing major supporting roles in Dark Shadows Under the Eyes (a mad etymologist who tries to impale the benighted, candle-toting heroine on an insect pin) and The Last Days of Sodom and Gomorrah (the Angel of the Lord, and also, at the end, the Hand of the Lord, seen to strike and apply a match to the cut-out city of Gomorrah). I bet you didn't know this secret, dark chapter of my past . . . Of course not. They were films a friend of mine made for a college film course. They have not been, alas, in general release. We didn't win any Oscars.

The Whisperer in Darkness is on the same level. Another rare Lovecraft film, with considerably more pretensions, but hardly any better, is The Music of Erich Zann. It is hard to forget the awesome cosmic belly-dancer . . .

--Darrell Schweitzer, Strafford, PA

It's been a number of years since I've been reading your publication, and, lo! I must say that your last effort in #64 has forced me to give you folks a letter of congratulations. Wow! A knockout! I can see rings of Lovecraftians dancing about in circles with joy over this one. The R'lyeh Review, which is always in-

formative and exciting, was even more so. The verses by Mr. Tierney and Mr. Schweitzer gave me a much needed chuckle in the advent of college finals.

And Mail Call? Mail Call is opening into an even broader and complex forum for our fellow readers. Not satisfied to delve into mere trivia over whether "old Grandpa" sounded like Mickey Mouse or not, the Crypt readers are conversing over the roles of women and men in weird fiction and "deconstructionism" and such. And they do so intelligently without losing their good sense of humor. All so exciting! I can only expect that it will only open up more controversy in the future. Everyone give yourself a pat on the back for a job well done.

By the way, may I also congratulate Donald Burleson (look Don, a compliment!) for his outstanding letter of response to his criticism of late. He handled his remarks with remarkable professionalism and, even more surprising, clarity. The critics do, after all, have a good point. I must say, that despite the interest he generates in his topics and ideas, his effect is somewhat diminished by his exceptionally dry prose. Now, it seems if he carried out his articles just a little bit looser, as in his last letter, I believe people would react with much more enthusiasm to his intelligent and well-informed commentary. Regardless, however people might have written about Mr. Burleson in the past, I hope no one will deny that his ideas and essays are, as always, warmly welcomed and appreciated by the readers. Cheers, Don, and well done!

The Herbert West installments were even better than expected. It was a constant joy to see the plot twist from here to there and back again. Of late, I can think of no other Crypt fiction which has brought me so much delight and surprise. I think, though, that Mr. Cannon may have a Melville obsession developing as of late. I was quite surprised NOT to see a "Great White Beast" sloshing off in the

bog's distance. At any rate, the entire series was carried out wonderfully, and I believe should be included, wherever possible, beside the master's original episodes. Bravo! Everyone rise and give the fellows enthusiastic applause.

The mag's cover art is getting much better, thanks to the current patch of contributing artists. There were times in the past, I must confess, when I was rather embarrassed to be seen walking around with it, but now that seems to be a solved problem.

Finally, there is a certain question which has been nagging me for quite some time. I was wondering if there was any sort of secret code designated to the coloring of the covers. One month pink, the next yellow, and after that another yellow. Is this some evil plot? Some damned intrusion by the forces of the nether dimensions? Or is it in fact, pure chance, decided merely on the aesthetic qualities of color combined with the artwork? But somehow that last explanation is too simple, too pat, to be the truth of it all. No, there is something darker at hand here, and I'm certain that, as editors of this malevolent publication, you'll probably ignore this letter, or edit it during the printing or respond with some baldfaced, inhuman, demonic lie. But I must warn you, we, the readers, are on to you! Beware you devils! Prepare to be blasted back to whence you came! --Krishna C. Sherman

San Francisco, CA

Wow, these last two issues certainly followed each other closely.

I really enjoy'd #65. Will's article seem'd a bit too cruel to something that was obviously an amateur production created by fans. I remember thinking it a hoot that Vernon Shea was in the film. He had very strong links to Lovecraft fandom at the time, so it is not surprising that he was in the film. Will must remember that for those of us who were young starry-eyed Lovecraft fans, to know someone who had corresponded with HPL was a kick in ye behind. "The Whisperer in Darkness" was Shea's favorite Lovecraft tale, and he was highly amused to star as Akeley. Vernon had no pretensions about the film, and described it as "crude" in his letters to me, saying that the cast was "cruddy." Vernon had just finished writing his own screenplay version of "Thing on the Doorstep" at the time, which I never got to read. Whatever this fannish film lacks, and I'm certain it must be quite lacking, it was a sincere attempt by Lovecraft fans to film HPL. That point was completely overlook'd by Will, and it should be pointed out. Sincerity in matters Lovecraftian is important to me. (Also, Will is mistaken in saying that Shea was publish'd in *Weird Tales*.)

"Fun Guys" was a delight. I was overjoy'd to read that someone else loved "The Outsider," as it's one of my favorite HPL yarns, and I've always hated how so many people



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dismiss it as a minor story.

David's wee piece on Tremaine was wonderful, and I admire how there are people out there who are dedicated to setting records correct and giving people their due. Justice is a great and valuable thing.

Mr. Brower's article was interesting, but what I really enjoy'd was how you preceded it with Ligotti's "The Voice In the Bones." Thomas is the supreme Lovecraftian surrealist.

I fear I found Eddy's tale somewhat dull. I rarely enjoy these tales that begin with two tired old men placidly discussing the wonders and terrors of life. I cannot relate to those kinds of characters, and if I were to write such a tale one of the men would be applying vermilion lipstick while the other carves Lovecraftian adjectives into his flesh.

--Wilum Pugmire, Seattle, WA

Just a note sparked off by Kevin A. Ross' endorsement of Michael Slade's *Ghoul* in *Crypt* #65.

My opinion, for what it's worth, is that the book stinks. It strikes me very much as a cynical attempt to exploit the horror market by a bunch of people ("Michael Slade" is apparently three individuals, two of whom are "Vancouver lawyers who specialise in the field of criminal insanity") who have two main reasons for padding out their basic slasher story with references to popular horror writers and heavy metal bands, i.e., (1) They will gain credibility with the horror/rock fan, who it seems is disturbingly susceptible to the lure of name-dropping; (2) They can promote their moral distaste for both forms of entertainment by linking it firmly to psychopathic disorder and having their hero proclaim at one point: "In one way, horror stories, do rot the brain."

As for the Mythos connection, the authors base their curt explanation of Where That Weird Guy Lovecraft Was At entirely upon that "quotation" which begins: "All my stories, unconnected though they

may be . . ." Need I say more?

If anyone else out there has read *Ghoul* I'd be interested to hear what they thought about it. For those who haven't . . . well, I think you catch my drift. Please let's not encourage these people!

--Simon MacCulloch  
Middlesex, England

Well, the 'ole bete noir is back again. I was happy to read the more conciliatory letter from Susan Michaud in *Crypt* #65 even though it was a sort of backhanded one. She must not have referred to my original letter in *Crypt* #55 when she asked the question: "That doesn't mean men are better than women, does it?" Because in my letter, I distinctly state "The odds of good female writers to good male writers must be the same" (as the proportion of male to female readers and thus those inspired to write) "and so, with the limited publishing opportunities we have, only the very best get into print." Pretty clear isn't it? I never said men were better than women. In fact, just the opposite, that they existed in exactly equal proportions. The rest of my letter was personal opinion and acknowledged as so.

In answer to Mr. Dziemlanowicz' request regarding my two or three readable horror writers, I'd be glad to oblige. Although I hope Mr. D. (give me a break, writing your full last name more than once in a letter would probably break my fingers) realizes that my figures were not written in stone. Writers in horror fiction that I enjoy reading fall into two rough categories: the first are the really good writers that I know I'll enjoy no matter what, the second are those that produce darn good stories at a more leisurely pace, missing the mark more often than they hit it. Karl Edward Wagner holds first place all by his lonesome in my book, no two ways about it; next would be T. E. D. Klein whose short stories I invariably enjoy (his novel, *The Ceremonies*, read very well, but missed the mark badly in its unrealistic

depiction of a "good Catholic girl" and the disappointing, anticlimactic ending); and finally, a new addition to my list, Thomas Ligotti who began with me as a bit of clunky writer but who rapidly smoothed out his style to become one of the people whose work I anxiously look forward to. Going through my horror fiction shelf, I find that truly, there are only these three I can unequivocally recommend to anyone. The second tier of writers is a longer list: Eddy C. Bertin, R. David Ludwig, Mark Rainey, W. H. Pugmire, Robert Bloch, Stephen King (!) (some of his short stories), Henry J. Vester III, David Daniel, to a lesser extent, Brian Lumley and Ramsey Campbell. Then there are a host of one shot, stab in the dark writers, too numerous to mention (or remember their names). I admit my personal standards are exacting, preferring genre fiction published before the fifties because I think the writing styles were more studied and controlled.

--Pierre Comtois, Lowell, MA

Thanks for No. 66 of *Crypt*. I was especially interested in the conversation with the late Edward Hoffmann Price. It is nice to know that someone thinks we did not write *Dark Valley Destiny* in order to vilify Robert Howard.

About the incident Price relates on page 43, where he says "Sprague thought that Howard was just trying to give a tenderfoot a few thrills . . ." I did not actually think that in the sense of believing it or being convinced of it. I merely deemed it a speculative possibility, having heard stories of Texans' fondness for such japes. In particular, Fletcher Pratt told a tale of an Englishman who said to his Texan hosts: "What's this strange custom I hear of, called 'lynching'?" The chief host said: "Aw sure, we hang niggers all the time. Fetch me a nigger and we'll show you." A black man was presently produced and hanged, much impressing the visitor. Actually the man had ex-

traordinarily powerful neck muscles and let himself be hanged for money as a stunt from time to time. As to how true the tale is, I can only say that I heard it from Fletcher, who had heard it from I don't know whom.

On page 35, I loved Mr. Timm's picture of the Three Musketeers of WT. I wish I owned the original.

About E. Hoffmann Price's comments on *Dark Valley Destiny*, I should like to add notes to tidy up loose ends, using the facts that have transpired since we wrote the book. On page 204, we tell of the poetic pen pal of REH, who stopped at Cross Plains in the early 1930s to visit Howard. We said: "The man's identity is not known for certain, but he was probably Benjamin Francis Musser (1889-1951), poet and prominent Catholic layman, with whom Howard is known to have corresponded."

My colleague Glenn Lord discovered that the visitor was indeed Musser, who was on a poetry-reading tour of the US. The fat, jolly patroness of Texan literature, Lexie Dean Robertson of Rising Star, had persuaded Musser to read poetry to her group. He took advantage of this stay to look up his Cross Plains pen pal. But they did not get on well, and the pal penmanship abruptly ended. I tried to find any of Musser's descendants who could tell Musser's side of the story but without success. We can but guess that REH went into one of his surly moods.

The other loose end is on page 337, when REH and Novalyne Price had their last serious date. (It was not altogether their last, as we said; but subsequent meetings were more formal, with impersonal talk.) Novalyne Price Ellis published a detailed account of that date in her excellent memoir of Robert Howard, *One Who Walked Alone* (Grant, 1986). This sheds light on the affair that makes it look a bit different from the guess that the de Camps, lacking firsthand information, put forward.

Novalyne was fearful that Robert



would plunge into heavy love talk. A year earlier she would have welcomed such an initiative; but since then she had concluded, reluctantly but logically, that Robert would make, as she said, "an impossible husband!" If he spoke of love, she would have to turn him down flat. (This was long before the sexual revolution, so casual sex probably never even occurred to them.) Dreading the prospect, she could think of evading it only by keeping the talk on a joking, bantering level.

Robert was in a highly emotional state, not so much with love of Novalyne but rather with horror at his mother's impending death. He burst out: "I want to live! I want a woman to love, a woman to share my life and believe in me, to want me and love me. . . . I want to live and to love" (p. 267). To us it sounds as if he were desperately trying to find someone to talk him out of the resolve he had held from childhood on, not to outlive his mother.

So the twain were on a basis of complete misunderstanding. Novalyne's only replies to Robert's cries for help were to kid him about his walrus mustache. Since Robert had never confided to her his suicidal resolve, Novalyne had no idea that she was being asked to pull a man back from the brink and was horrified when she subsequently learned of his suicide. Whether anything she could have said would have made a difference in the long run is, of course, impossible to say. His fixation was a strong one.

--L. Sprague de Camp, Plano, TX

A minor point of information: The article on Ed Price states that he was born near San Jose, California. Actually, he hailed from the central part of the state. As he put it in his first letter to me, "A letter from Fresno always brings a nostalgic glow. I was born in Fowler, hundreds of years ago."

At some later point, he did time in San Jose—prior to his stint in the Philippines, he was an usher at

a downtown theater here.

--Dennis Rickard, San Jose, CA

Crypt #66 is a good, well-rounded issue. I can remember buying a copy of The Dunwich Horror—it was one of the first Lovecraft books I ever bought—and wondering why Innsmouth and "The Shadow out of Time" were set in a typeface different from the rest of the book. David Schultz illuminates the whole history of HPL's Best Supernatural Stories and the Arkham House The Dunwich Horror in fascinating detail. I found perhaps most fascinating the correspondence which Derleth had with Wandrei and Bloch concerning the contents of the volume. Before The Outsider and Others emerged, Derleth and Barlow had correspondence on this subject—concerning the contents of the first AH omnibus of HPL's work—and if I recall correctly Barlow mentioned some lists of possible tables of contents which Lovecraft himself had left. But I am foggy on this.

In assessing the impact of the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs on HPL's writing, Bill Fulwiler begins to mine a very rich vein—the impact of early twentieth-century popular literature on Lovecraft's work. Lovecraft mentions a few favorite stories from the pulps, but I have little doubt that a rereading of the files of the magazines he is known to have read would uncover other probable influences. I never read Burroughs beyond the original Tarzan novel, but Fulwiler makes me want to do so.

Burleson contributes two worthy offerings to #66. His essay on "Lovecraft and the Death of Tragedy" certainly makes clear that the modern cosmic viewpoint spells the death of human-centered tragedy as written by the ancient Greeks. Modelling the complexities of human language is one of the crucial tasks remaining for the information sciences. I wonder whether linguistics and modern literary criticism, between the two of them, will eventually enjoy the aid of a "calculus"

of human language. I, for one, am fascinated by the question of how closely machines will be able to think and communicate like human beings in the future. I wonder, for instance, whether the microchip holds the potential of correcting degenerating thought processes in human beings—of stopping Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, moderating serious mental illness, etc. Lovecraft, however, adequately foresaw that there is a risk of the displacement of what is human in us in such processes.

Dorfman furnishes an interesting note regarding the sources of Charles Dexter Ward. We know that Lovecraft owned an early edition of Mather's *Magnalia*, which he bequeathed to his good friend James F. Morton, Jr. (Even at 1937 prices one wonders whether this bequest constituted the greater part of Lovecraft's estate, which was proved at under \$500.) "The Door" by Michael Storm (a pseudonym?) and Paul Berglund on Leiber's *Mythos* story both also furnish fascinating sidelights. I wish, however, that the specific place of publication of "The Door" was given.

Mirosław Lipiński has translated more powerful works by Grabinski than the early tale published in *Crypt* #66, but even this early story shows Grabinski's genius as a writer of supernatural stories. For some reason, I have always been attracted to stories which disguise, to a limited extent, the persons and places involved in the action of the story. Perhaps this device suggests to me authorial intent to be compact and to tell only what is necessary, whereas my own worst fault in writing is to try to explain everything.

The interview with the late E. Hoffmann Price was a valuable reprint. I doubt whether Lovecraft could ever have been as commercially successful as Price. By way of contrast, I think Robert E. Howard showed he could write for many different commercial markets. Had he survived to 65, I think Lovecraft would have written and pub-

lished a major speculative novel in the period 1945-1955. By way of contrast, I would expect Robert E. Howard would have become a major regional writer.

A major documentary on Lovecraft filmed by Alain Resnais would have been a memorable event indeed. Much of Providence today would still be much as Lovecraft would have remembered, but people who can remember him in a meaningful way are fast disappearing. Imagine what a documentary filmed in 1938 or 1939 might have captured: Annie Gamwell, Maurice Moe, James Morton, other friends and acquaintances by the score, and Lovecraft's final study at 66 College Street. In correspondence following the death of HPL, his friend Clark Ashton Smith expressed the hope that this study might be preserved as a museum, and although the idea was and is impractical, I begin more and more to appreciate its merits. What a treasure we would have today if this marvellous room were preserved intact within the John Hay Library, where, before the List Art Building was built, it might have enjoyed very much the same view which it enjoyed at 66 College Street. But if we are honest we have to acknowledge that Lovecraft is an author very rich in artifacts. I think this is part of what makes his work so eminently collectible.

Well, your magazine continues to be an outstanding contribution to the field. While others may mourn the passing of some of the other Cryptic Press titles, I do not, if it means that *Crypt of Cthulhu* enjoys a better chance of survival. I am not sure whether you have yet marked your 10th anniversary or not (although I suspect you have); in any case, what I mean to say is that I don't think a retrospective article on your past pages would be a form of editorial self-indulgence at all. --Kenneth W. Faig, Jr.

Glenview, IL

Dorfman's article "Essential Salts" in *Crypt* #66 is correct in identify-

ing Cotton Mather as Lovecraft's source for the "Borellus" quote in The Case of Charles Dexter Ward. However, it's a little late. Barton Levi St. Armand pointed this out long ago in his article "The Source for Lovecraft's Knowledge of Borellus in The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" (Nyctalops #13, May 1977). I acknowledged St. Armand's finding in my edition of Lovecraft's Commonplace Book (1987), wherein I noted that Lovecraft cribbed the epigraph by Lactantius at the beginning of "The Festival" from Mather as well.

--David E. Schultz  
Milwaukee, WI

Burleson's piece on "Lovecraft and the Death of Tragedy" I found especially enjoyable. I can't help feeling, though, that HPL would have rejected Joseph Wood Krutch's final stance toward the cosmos and humanity's relationship to it. Krutch seems to have had a fine sense of what existence was all about but finally couldn't take it and decided that allegiance to illusions was better than facing reality. I suspect that HPL would have found a closer affinity with more recent probers of human nature such as B. F. Skinner and E. O. Wilson. The latter's "Sociobiology," explaining human social behavior in Darwinian terms, would have "rung true" to him, I'm sure. And Llonel Tiger's study of optimism (and religion as a subdivision of that category) as an attitude conveying a reproductive advantage, would have won his approval, I'm sure. Philosophy and literary analyses are fun, but the sciences are always outrunning them and making them look silly in retrospect.

--Richard L. Tierney  
Mason City, IA

Pass the salt—looks like I've got to eat a lot of my words.

There's no getting around it—or, in this case, burrowing beneath it. E. P. Berglund caught me disseminating some incorrect information. In his article "The Burrowers Beneath by Fritz Leiber" (Crypt 66),

he quotes my review of Brian Lumley's The Burrowers Beneath, in which I stated, "Coincidentally, it [The Burrowers Beneath] was also the same title Fritz Leiber had given a 3,000 word fragment of a Mythos story he began writing after Lovecraft's death, but eventually destroyed." Following the fascinating excerpts of his correspondence with Leiber, in which he appears to prove conclusively that (1) the fragment was actually entitled "The Lovecraftian Story," (2) the fragment was begun before Lovecraft's death, (3) the fragment was 4,000 to 5,000 words long, and (4) Leiber did not destroy the fragment but actually used it as the basis for the novella "The Terror from the Depths," Mr. Berglund states with consideration, "In conclusion, I do want to say that I am in no way accusing Stefan Dziemianowicz of faulty research, only that I don't know what his source was. The faults may not even be his, but his original source's."

Well, yes and no.

My source was Fritz Leiber's own review of Brian Lumley's novel in the June 1975 (Vol. 24, No. 4) issue of Fantastic. (Okay, the truth is now known—I don't actually read the books, I read everyone else's reviews!) I fear I garbled the information from the following paragraphs, which deserve to be quoted in their entirety:

I can personally testify to the siren power of the temptation to get into the Mythos game. I corresponded voluminously with Lovecraft during his last eight months and it had two profound effects on me: I was permanently inculcated with his scientific skepticism toward all branches of the occult, and I became convinced that the supernatural horror story and the fantasy (and sword-and-sorcery) story are as much art as any other sort of fiction and demand a writer's best efforts—self and world-searching, honesty, scholarship and carefulest

(continued on page 9)

# NEXT TIME . . .

Crypt of Cthulhu #69 is our third Lin Carter issue featuring more strange treasures from Lin's files of unpublished manuscripts. Among the goodies are these:

- "Terror Wears Yellow"
- "A Bottle of Djinn"
- "Sweet Tooth"
- "The Bell in the Tower" (a completion of Lovecraft's fragment "The Descendant")
- "The Strange Doom of Enos Harker"
- "Nameless Gods and Entities: Robert E. Howard's Contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos"
- "Baleful Myths and Liturgies: Clark Ashton Smith's Contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos"
- "The Great Old Ones," an updated version of his glossary "H. P. Lovecraft: The Gods"

By Gorm, you won't want to miss it!

## CRYPT OF CTHULHU

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Cover and inside art by S. Thomas Brown

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